

JANUARY  
2025

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*Senior Pastor*

# UNITED



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*

Dear Church Family,

Happy New Year! It is truly hard to believe we are embarking into a New Year. As I look back over the past year, we rejoice in God's faithfulness to our church through His people. We have seen people saved, baptized, and added to our church. We see new faces almost every week in the worship services. To God be the Glory! We presented a challenge to the church to raise \$150,000 for some much-needed improvements to the signage, buildings, and more. Together, we rose to the occasion with almost \$ 200,000 coming in to-date. This was everyone having a part in reaching and exceeding the goal.

For 2025, our theme to kick-off the New Year is "United"! The projects 2024 was a clear demonstration of what a united body with everyone doing his and her part can accomplish. This year we can do even more for the gospel of Christ and to see His church grow significantly over these next 12 months. How does this happen? It starts with Each One Reach One with the message of hope found in the gospel. Every member unified in doing the work in the church. Recognize the enemy will always work against us, but will not prevail because of our sold-out commitment to Christ and acknowledging we are all on the same team. Work on solutions together for every obstacle that may come our way and give God the Glory.

Much is said in the Scripture about unity and its importance as a priority in the church. So, as we march through this year let's dedicate ourselves to be United as the body of Christ at The First Baptist Church of Fort Worth and allow God to do His work through us UNITED!



## *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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*January 5, 2025*



# *United in Fellowship*

## *1 Corinthians 1:4-9*

Focal Verse:

"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

1 Corinthians 1:9

## Introduce

Several weeks ago, after cooking dinner, I finished loading the dishwasher to a reasonable capacity, entered the appropriate settings, and started the cycle. For a much needed and well-deserved rest, I then sat on my couch and began watching television as it did its work. As it hummed and rattled, its usual sounds suddenly turned into a thunderous thud. After quickly canceling the cycle, I opened the door to discover several pieces lying strewn across the bottom of the machine. Although I am no expert on appliances, they appeared to be pretty important. Based on the diagram of the dishwasher, they looked like parts associated with the lower spray arm assembly with heat shield. Upon examining them further, it seemed as if detergent along with oxidation had blocked the water from flowing freely over the years ultimately causing pressure to build leading to the explosion.

Even though I knew the dishwasher would not function properly as intended with just “a few” pieces missing, suppose hypothetically for a moment that I had continued trying to run it. After all, I thought to myself that it still had “most” of the pieces. The motor still ran and the water still flowed to it without any problem.



And the lower spray arm looked “mostly” intact. Water and soap could still spray from it. What do you think would have happened had I tried to complete the cycle? It would have turned on, run, and sounded like it was “doing” something. By chance, it may have even somehow gotten a little of the grime off the dishes. But, in the end, it wouldn’t have accomplished its intended purpose of cleaning the dishes completely. It may have “worked” somewhat, but its work would have been neither efficient nor effective.

Through the church, God has assembled a complete body with every spiritual gift we need for the work of ministry. For this, Paul offers praise to the Lord as he begins his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:5). Every piece is important and plays a specific role in achieving God’s purpose for which He has called us. Each member, therefore,

## Introduce

is responsible for using his or her specific gift for service to the glory of God. God has united us in fellowship with His Son to share the gospel with the world and help one another mature in our own personal walk through the written Word. For the church to work effectively and efficiently as God designed it, we need every member working together in Christ!

Even though the church may have all the parts it needs for ministry, some of the pieces may not function in the way God intended. Since God has given us freewill, some pieces choose not to participate. They don't use their God-given gifts to serve. Certainly, this will not derail God's plan or hinder the spread of the gospel. But it does put a strain on the church as a whole and those members striving to do their part. It causes unnecessary hardship and burden for others to pick up the slack for the other parts missing in action. God expects everyone to do his or her part. We need each part working together as He has gifted and equipped us. We can't call ourselves faithful or obedient if we don't participate in the things God has called us to do as His people—the church. Therefore, may we as His people unite in fellowship through our service to Him whereby we foster spiritual and numerical growth through this local church!

Key  
Question

In what ways do you see missing pieces putting a strain on some ministries within the church?



### 1 Corinthians 1:4-6

#### **THE GRACE TO MINISTER:**

After greeting the church in Corinth (1 Cor 1:1-3), Paul begins by thanking and praising God for what He has done through His people there—a customary feature of most of his letters in the New Testament. He specifically thanks God for His **grace given to them by Christ Jesus** (v. 4). Typically, we associate God’s grace with salvation or the renewed life we now live in Christ. By **grace**, God saved us (see 1 Cor 15:10; Eph 2:8-9). But in this context, it primarily refers to the **grace** that God has **given** us to minister on His behalf. In verse 5, Paul clarifies how God has **given** them **grace** by enriching them **in everything**—a reference to the spiritual gifts they need for ministry.

It isn’t unusual for Paul to describe ministry as a gift of **grace**. After all, the word we most-often translate as “spiritual gift” literally means “grace gift.” Elsewhere, Paul describes his personal ministry to the Gentiles as a “gift of the grace of God” (Eph 3:7). Later in this same letter to the Ephesians, he also reminds the church, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph 4:7). He then spells out that God has **given** them this gift “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (v. 12). Therefore, like Paul, we must regard ministry not as a laborious work to be dreaded, but a gift of **grace** to be utilized and cherished!

Too often, people view ministry and service as a duty or chore— simply a task to be done rather than a meaningful act that glorifies the Lord by building His church and expanding His kingdom. They see it as something burdensome added to their already busy schedule. They may even regard



it as series of menial tasks without much reward. So, they dread it and try to avoid it. If I were to ask you what chores or projects you absolutely despise or dread, most of you would probably have an answer on the tip of your tongues. Some of you might list chores like doing laundry, washing the dishes, taking out the trash, dusting the house, cleaning the bathroom, servicing the car, shopping, taking down the Christmas lights,

## Instruct

so forth. While we may find these tasks tolerable or manageable at times, we don't usually find joy in them. We certainly don't view them as a privilege or gift from God, but rather a curse. Because of the curse for our sin, all the chores and projects we now do have become repetitive and exhausting (Gen 3:14-19). Yet, God did not create them as such in the first place. He established them as an honor and privilege to represent Him by serving and caring for His creation (Gen 1:28; 2:15).

Question  
# 1

What chores or activities do you dread doing in your weekly routine? How would you compare your attitude in these things to that of your service to the Lord?

In Christ who has saved us and transformed us to have a new perspective (Rom 12:1-2), we ought to view our service to the Lord as a privilege—a part of the gracious gift of the new life He has **given** us. Viewing ministry as a gracious gift would revolutionize the spirit in which we would all serve. We would look for opportunities daily to serve the Lord. We would find creative ways to serve Him through our secular jobs (Eph 6:5-8), at school, in our communities (1 Peter 2:13-16), and through our hobbies. Serving Him would become our priority not because of some tangible reward or recognition we may receive, but because of the joy it brings in representing our Creator in everything we do! Collectively as the church we must serve together not just on Sundays or Wednesdays, but wherever God may take us throughout the week. If we carry the gospel with us wherever we go and don't see our service primarily tied to a "building" or even a specific program, think of the impact we would have and the imprint we would leave on our communities for Christ with everyone looking for opportunities to serve!

Please don't misunderstand this point about not tying our service to a "building" or a specific program. We are to work through the local church to connect people with Christ (i.e., make disciples) and then connect them to this body which preaches the truth to help them grow in their faith. This doesn't give us the freedom to go rogue so to speak and do things without consideration for the church as a whole, specifically committing the church to certain projects or making promises that you yourself cannot fulfill. Rather, it means that we represent Christ and the church within the boundaries


and structure in which God has constituted it to minister to the world. As a whole, the church needs to do a better job in serving by taking the gospel outside its weekly gatherings to the people who really need to hear it. We can't wait for the people to come to us; we must take the gospel to them using the spiritual gifts God has **given** us (Matt 19:37-38; 28:19-20). May we, therefore, collectively look for innovative ways of sharing the gospel and connecting people with His church!

Question  
# 2

In what ways do you serve the Lord by ministering to people in secular settings such as at work or school?

Furthermore, Paul qualifies his thanksgiving to the Lord as occurring **always**. Regardless of the circumstances, he never ceases to give God glory and praise for His work through the Corinthian church. Paul rightly acknowledges the work of Christ in the community and focuses on Him rather than the abilities, accomplishments, and achievements of the people, for this would have likely discouraged him in what he saw. As we will learn over the course of our study, the Corinthian church suffered from much dysfunction: divisions and competition (1:10-17), spiritual pride (4:6-13; 8:1-3), sexual immorality (5:1-13), legal disputes (6:1-11), prioritizing specific spiritual gifts to the detriment of the others (12:1-14:25), a lack of love (13:1-13), and disorderly worship services (14:25-40) among other issues. Despite their many moral and doctrinal problems (1 Corinthians) as well as their antagonistic attitude toward him personally at times (2 Corinthians), Paul still gives thanks; he finds reason to rejoice! He never allows any of these negative things to consume his attention and distract from his worship of the Lord. He still sees God at work rather than a church which has completely failed.

Although the church does have glaring issues that need to be lovingly corrected, Paul never becomes cynical or pessimistic in his outlook. He doesn't write them off as a lost cause, but maintains hope in Christ to transform them. Even though he thanks God for His work among the people, he doesn't ignore their many problems or tolerate



IN EVERYTHING  
GIVE THANKS; FOR THIS IS  
THE WILL OF GOD  
IN CHRIST JESUS FOR YOU.

I THESSALONIANS 5:18

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their sin. Nor does he overlook the effect their spiritual immaturity and dysfunction have on their witness as God's people. On the contrary, he identifies their problems, addresses them, and takes steps to correct them. He corrects them, but doesn't exhibit a critical spirit or complain. Under the inspiration and authority of the Holy Spirit, he doesn't mince words or beat around the bush; he deals with the people directly so they might repent and learn from their mistakes. For this reason, Paul can praise God at the same time he offers such harsh correction, for God will reconcile those who confess their sins and return to Him! God is **always** at work!

Human nature seems to compel us to overlook the positive and focus on the negative. We may not do this intentionally or maliciously, but we tend to become critical and complain, pointing out mistakes, flaws, and the things we don't like. Most of the time, however, we base our complaints solely off our personal preferences and perspectives which have very little to do with correcting a sinful action or an unbiblical attitude. When we constantly engage in such negative talk, it becomes sinful itself and a distraction in our relationship with the Lord because we begin to focus selfishly on our desires rather than trust Him to meet our needs.

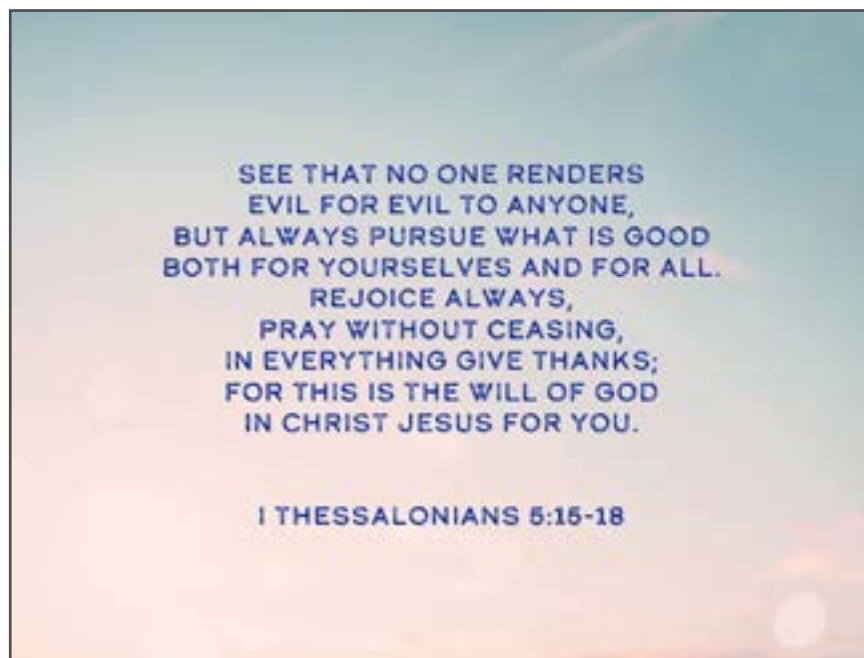
We see this most clearly in the generation wandering in the wilderness after being freed from Egypt. They constantly complained about everything! It became such a distraction that they failed to trust God to deliver the bountiful land He had long ago promised their ancestors into their hands (Num 13:26-33). Because of their unbelief and disobedience, God punished this generation by sentencing them to wander throughout the Sinai wilderness until they passed away (Num 32:11-12). Even in our own generation, we still see people who miss out on God's blessings and forfeit His promises because they selfishly focus on their desires; thus, they ultimately fail to trust the Lord to meet their needs and guide their paths (Prov 3:5-6).

Question  
# 3

What is the difference between loving correction such as Paul gives in 1 Corinthians and a critical, negative spirit which constantly complains?

In general, we have become conditioned to dwell on the negative, especially if it doesn't suit our personal tastes. For most, criticism comes naturally whereas compliments require much thought. We need balance. We should pair godly

correction concerning legitimate issues (Matt 18:15-20) along with thanksgiving to the Lord for His work in and through our lives. Therefore, we should strive to give an accurate assessment of the individual while also glorifying God. Even though the Corinthians abused their spiritual gifts by using them pridefully without love to exalt themselves which Paul addresses throughout this letter, he still finds reason to praise the Lord. He thanks God for the **grace** He's **given** them to minister using these gifts! In Philippians 1:15-18, Paul deals with a similar situation where some people wishing to cause him grief while in prison preach Christ with the wrong motives—out of envy, strife, and selfish-ambition. While expressing concern and pointing out the flaw



in their attitudes and motives, Paul doesn't lash out in vengeful attacks, but instead says, "Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice" (Phil 1:15). Despite their misguided motives, Paul still praises the Lord!

How can Paul be thankful and still find reason to rejoice amidst a highly dysfunctional

church with so many moral and doctrinal problems in Corinth? He can rejoice because he focuses on Christ—not an individual person or personality or even a specific problem within the church. Therefore, he can still clearly see God at work despite the dysfunction of man. It is no accident that Paul mentions Christ or some form of His title "our Lord Jesus Christ" nine times in the first nine verses (vv. 1, 2 [2x], 3-4, 6-9)—the highest concentration in any of his letters. Sometimes people may tend to overlook the concentration of such language because the name and title of Jesus and Christ have become so familiar to us as religious phraseology that we may utter them almost automatically without much thought. Even though we may treat His name and title with great reverence, we may read or hear them without ever really pausing to dwell on the significance of His presence in helping us navigate the difficulties of life with joy.

Regardless of the circumstances, we must look for Christ at work and take the

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opportunity to praise Him for what He is doing despite any dysfunction. In a world fraught with problems and filled with imperfect people, focusing on Christ helps us accomplish three things. First, it reminds us of the importance of cultivating our own personal relationship with Him and not allowing ourselves to become distracted by busyness or the peer pressure of this world (Luke 10:38-42). Second, seeing Christ at work helps keep us from becoming completely discouraged and disheartened in a chaotic and confused world dominated by sin. It gives us hope of forgiveness, renewal, and transformation through Him not only for ourselves, but for others as well! Third, focusing on Christ helps us to respond to dysfunction and sin with **grace** and spiritual wisdom by reminding us of the **grace** which God has shown us. Consequently, we will seek to restore an individual and lead them to repentance in Christ rather than approaching the situation with a judgmental, arrogant spirit of superiority (Gal 6:1). As a result, we can be thankful and rejoice no matter the circumstances or outcomes because Christ remains sovereignly at work in the world accomplishing His divine plan despite the imperfections of people!

### Question # 4

What circumstances and situations have the propensity to distract you most in your focus on Christ?

In this introductory section of 1 Corinthians, the abundant references to Christ also signal the primary problem within the Corinthian church. They have taken their eyes off the Lord and put them on the personalities and preferences of individuals. As a result, they had begun viewing themselves as independent, self-sufficient where they could rely on their own giftedness to deal with life's challenges and undertake ministry. In 1 Corinthians 4:8, they specifically regarded themselves as "already rich"—the same root word translated **were enriched** here in verse 5—in spiritual wisdom and ability (1 Cor 4:6-13). But they must remember that God is the One who has **enriched** them in **everything**. No ability or gift which they have did not first come from God! Therefore, their knowledge and giftedness are a testament to God's power working through them and not their own strength. They must never forget that!

Most adolescents and teenagers go through a phase in which they fail to recognize that everything they have materially comes from their parents. Sometimes they only

come to realize this principle much later in life when they enter the workforce or when they have children of their own. For example, teens whose parents have provided them with a car will refer to it as “my car.” For this reason, they will sometimes challenge and push the boundaries their parents have set. They will question their authority to dictate their schedule or set limits on where they can go. They will complain when asked to run an errand or chauffeur a sibling. They demand freedom. They want complete control. Yet, the car is a gift provided to them to use for their benefit. In all likelihood, they don’t own it. They probably don’t pay for all their insurance or even much of their gas. Even so, they still view it as their possession which entitles them to certain rights and privileges.



Question  
# 5

In what areas are you most likely to regard yourself as self-sufficient and independent causing you to forget everything you have comes from Christ?

Similarly, believers sometimes forget that everything we have comes from the Lord to use for our benefit (edification) and His glory. Consequently, He has the right to dictate and shape the way we use the gifts He’s given us. He then reminds the Corinthians they were enriched in everything by Him! Thus, he points out two gifts in particular, utterance and knowledge, because they had become a source of pride and misuse within the community. The Greek phrase translated **in all utterance** literally means “in every word.” So, in more modern English, we would say that God has gifted them “in every kind of speech” to communicate the gospel. “Every kind of speech” then would include what we would consider preaching, teaching, prophecy, and evangelism (1 Cor 12:8; 13:1-2; 14:1-25). Likewise, the way Paul constructs the phrase **all knowledge** it means “every kind of knowledge”—whether about Him, about

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salvation, about sin, or about the way the world operates (1 Cor 8:1, 7, 10-11; 12:8; 13:2; 14:6). Taken in tandem with “speech,” therefore, they both refer to the believer’s ability to recognize the need for and be able to communicate the gospel. In other words, God has given us everything we need for ministry. We have no excuse not to share the gospel!

Through their communication of the gospel using these gifts, their **testimony** or witness about **Christ was confirmed** in them (v. 6). The Christian Standard Bible seems to have rendered the phrase closest to Paul’s intent: “In this way, the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you.” In this context, the word **testimony** almost becomes synonymous with the gospel. The Corinthians communicated the gospel both verbally as well as in how they lived it out visibly. For this reason, everyone, including those who did not have a relationship with Christ, could hear it from the Corinthians’ lips and see it through their transformed lives. As a result, their ministry was fruitful (John 15:5-8). We see this same effect of the gospel in Thessalonica. Paul describes how they had become “examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia” because they verbally shared the gospel while at the same time they evidenced it through their changed lives. Everyone could see for himself how they had turned from worshiping idols to serving “the living and true God” (1 Thess 1:5-10).

The Corinthians’ **testimony** about Christ provides an example of how we should convey our own **testimony**.

Communicating the gospel always involves a two-fold activity. We must share the message verbally. But this must always be coupled with us living it out visibly through our transformed lives. Technically, we cannot do one without the other. We can’t remain

silent and *only* live it out. Neither can we only share it verbally and not live it out; others would immediately see the hypocrisy in such an act. We need to live righteously patterning our lives after Christ, but we also need to be able to tell others how we can live such a life and explain how they can too!





Question  
# 6

How well do you communicate the gospel both verbally and visibly in your life? Which do you find the most difficult? Why?

## 1 Corinthians 1:7-8

### THE GIFT SUPPLIED:

Paul reiterates that God has graciously given the Corinthians everything they need to conduct ministry (1 Cor 12:1-31) and overcome hardships in life (2 Cor 12:9). He reminds them that they **come short in no gift** (v. 7). In more modern English, we would say that the Corinthians did not lack in any **gift** necessary for ministry. As His local body here in Fort Worth, God has also given us every **gift** we need for ministry too. He has equipped everyone who has a relationship with Him for service with a specific **gift** to use through the local church. When ministry “needs” seemingly go “unmet” or we see a lack of people willing to serve it says more about us as His people than it does about Him. To find a lack of people willing to use their giftedness to serve indicates a lack of faithfulness on our part and not a “failure” of God to equip us.

Question  
# 7

How has God gifted and equipped you for service through this church?

As a whole, our culture teaches us to compartmentalize our time and activities. We separate our lives into the spheres of work, family, personal, and church—but many people only allot their leftover time during the week to this the last category. Therefore, they only devote a specific amount of “their” time, finances, and energy to the Lord and then retain the rest to utilize at their own discretion. With this mentality, they begin to view their service more like a “job” than a ministry. Once they have given what they have identified as “their” allotment of time, finances, and resources to the Lord, they consider their duty complete. They’ve done their job. Although we should give and serve faithfully and obediently as God has blessed us, some people see their job description primarily as “attending” church, tithing, and keeping the Ten Commandments.

Question  
# 8

How do you allot your time during the week? In what areas do you invest the most time? How does that compare with the time you spend developing your relationship with Christ?

For this reason, they “serve” their time at church, clock out, and go home. Consequently, they begin to regard their service to the Lord as a to-do list which they can simply check off: I’ve prayed, I’ve read Scripture, I’ve tithed, I’ve attended church, I’ve fellowshiped, and I’ve served my two or three hours a week at church. While we should do all these things faithfully each week, we should never fall into the trap of thinking we’ve “done” our part by just attending church for a few hours. We don’t just punch in for the time we’re “expected” to be there and clock out when it’s over. Such a view of service and ministry seems to indicate that some people have forgotten that everything belongs to the Lord and we only serve as stewards or caretakers; they have forgotten how much the Lord sacrificed for us too. He gave His best. He gave everything so that we could have life through His Son.



Serving by using our spiritual gifts is a twenty-four-hour lifestyle. We should use them to reach the world with the gospel and make disciples just as Jesus has called us (Matt 28:19-20). In fact, God has called every believer to do these two things. It doesn’t matter what spiritual **gift** we may have received (1 Cor 12); God has graciously given them to each person in the church so that we might collectively work together to connect people to Christ through the gospel and that we might all grow together in our faith maturing spiritually as His people. Therefore, we gather regularly each week as the church to encourage each other and equip one another for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-12).

But our ministry doesn’t begin and end on the church campus! We must take the

gospel with us wherever we go. We should always be on mission. This doesn't mean that we can never rest or enjoy life. God has indeed built in time for us to recuperate and re-energize—the very reason He instituted the Sabbath and the sabbatical year (Mark 2:23-28). Because God has given us every **gift** that we need for ministry, we should fully devote ourselves to His service and consciously be aware of the opportunities He gives us for ministry whenever and wherever they may arise. While we can rest and recreate at times in the way God has designated, we're always on the clock as His representatives. We must always look for opportunities to share the gospel and make disciples while growing in our own faith.

Question  
# 9

In what ways has “ministry” become primarily focused on the church campus? How does God want us to use our gifts to reach our families and the culture with the gospel?

If God has provided the church with every **gift** needed for ministry, there should never really be a “need” that goes unfilled. No ministry should ever lack people to serve. Yet, not every person who calls himself a follower of Christ serves using his **gift**! Even Jesus Himself laments, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matt 9:37). Only a few people in the church actually serve. We have many who attend, but few ever use their gifts to share the gospel, disciple others, and build the church. This puts a strain on the other members who do serve! Although people may give a variety of excuses as to why they don't serve, none of them are legitimate. If we are not using our gifts to share the gospel and build the church while growing in our own faith, we cannot call ourselves faithful or obedient.



Unfortunately, many ministry needs within the church often go unmet because we lack laborers to do their part. We need people willing to serve selflessly. Think of the church like a marching band performing a show at half-time. Each individual in

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the band has a specific role to fulfill—both musically and in their drill performance. Although each member has a distinctive role, the entire band must perform in unison following the direction of the drum majors or conductors. While marching, every musician must hit his or her spot exactly at the right time and in the right place on the field for the formation to function as designed! Those who miss their mark stick out like a sore thumb. The formation will have crooked components, large gaps, or even gaping holes if lacking musicians altogether. Moreover, each individual instruments must also play in the right key with the right rhythm at the exact right time or the music will sound like an unpleasant, jumbled mess.

To have a functional marching band, every musician must do his or her own part. Collectively, the band has a common goal and purpose, but each one has been gifted or tasked differently to fulfill it. Therefore, everyone must work together, following the direction of the leadership installed to keep the band on track. The church functions in much this same way. Every member must do his or her own part. Collectively, we have the same goal and purpose although Christ has gifted each one of us in the church differently to fulfill it. We must surrender to Him and allow the Holy Spirit whom He has sent to keep us on track to guide us daily. In addition, we must also follow the direction of the human leadership whom God has put in place to oversee the ministry within the church and keep us focused on the task at hand.

Whether or not we may have any musical expertise at all, we can easily become critical of the performance of others as mere spectators. If we've ever sat high atop a football stadium and watched a marching band at half-time, we can easily hear wrong rhythms and out-of-tune instruments; we can also quickly spot any formations missing musicians or ones in which they have not hit their mark. As a spectator, we view our "job" primarily as a critic who evaluates things solely for the entertainment



value. We have our preferences and we know immediately when something doesn't sound or look good. Therefore, it becomes easy for our to sit back and point out any errors or missing components. We're not involved so it gives us the perfect opportunity

to criticize!

Unfortunately, some people have this same mentality in the church. They see their “job” as critics. They point to all the needs and problems, but they have no part in the solution! They do nothing about the issues they have brought to the forefront! However, God hasn’t called us to be spectators who evaluate the performance of others or give reviews like a consumer. On the contrary, He’s called us to be involved. If God has brought a need or a problem to our attention, He most likely wants us to do something about it. He wants us to participate in resolving it. Rather than merely pointing out the need, therefore, we should ask, “How has God equipped me to meet it?” After all, we have everything required for ministry! God has provided it all. And He has graciously invited us to participate in what He is doing in the world He created. Let us join Him in His work through the church.

Question  
# 10

What needs do you see in the church?  
How has God called you to use your gift  
to fulfill those needs and help His church  
grow?

Paul notes that God has given us these gifts to utilize as we **eagerly** await **the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ**. In this context, the term **revelation** refers to Jesus’ return or second coming. Elsewhere, Jesus Himself instructs His disciples to prepare and be ready for His return by participating in the work His Father has entrusted them (Matt 25:14-30). God doesn’t want us to isolate ourselves inside the church walls and remain idle as we wait expectantly for His Son to return. On the contrary, He wants us to be involved in ministry. He wants us to declare the gospel to the world as we both celebrate and live out our salvation through Him.

Our faithful service through our spiritual gifts enables Christ to **confirm** us in the end so that **we may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ** (v. 8). While we are not saved by our good works or service (Matt 7:21-23; Eph 2:8-9), our service through our spiritual gifts does signify that we belong to Christ because we will bear fruit consistent with His character. Indeed, Jesus reveals, “You will know them by their fruits . . . a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit” (Matt 7:15-20). If we have a relationship with Christ, our love for Him should compel us to serve. Our service should become part of our transformed character where we not

## Instruct

only renew our minds from carnal thoughts, but we also dedicate our lives as living sacrifices who glorify the Lord through all our works (Rom 12:1-2). For those who serve Him faithful using the gifts with which He has equipped them, one day when He calls them home to reside with Him forever they will hear, "Well done My good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21, 23).

Question  
# 11

If God were to call you home today, how would He evaluate your service and ministry within the church?

## 1 Corinthians 1:9

### THE GOD WHO IS FAITHFUL:

Whereas the Corinthians have been anything but **blameless** or **faithful** because of their many moral and spiritual problems, **God** still remains **faithful** (v. 9). Despite their failures and struggles, they can still have hope! God can still use them if they repent and change direction. The God who has called them hasn't changed; He remains faithful even though they haven't.

His call hasn't changed. His offer for them to participate in their salvation by serving them through their spiritual gifts hasn't changed. He still wants to use them. He has still **called** them into the **fellowship of His Son!** This should also give us hope. As many problems as the Corinthians had, God still used

them. It doesn't matter what we did or didn't do in the past; He can still use us if we repent and change direction. God can overcome our past failures and inadequacies. Our past should never prevent us from serving, but should always serve as a reminder of God's gracious transformation in our lives which we can use to declare His glory unto the world.



If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

II Timothy 2:13

In antiquity, the term **fellowship** meant more than just a social gathering of people sharing common interests around food in the way many modern people have come to understand it. Biblical **fellowship** connotes more the idea of participation according to our understanding. In this context as well as others, fellowship means the participation in living the transformed life Christ has given us. It means conforming our lives to imitate His character. Thus, fellowship signifies the involvement of living out our salvation through acts of service and righteousness. Like our service, our **fellowship** isn't something that begins and ends in the church. **Fellowship** or participation is something we must strive to undertake every day. Christ should be involved in every detail of our lives. Our participation should come in the form of our surrender. We should devote ourselves to serving Christ by being blameless in our walk, dedicated in our service, and determined to share the gospel with everyone we meet.

Question  
# 12

In what ways is our modern understanding of fellowship different than the idea of participation?

God has graciously given us everything we need for ministry through the church. We lack nothing. But sometimes, even though we have all the necessary parts, dysfunction still occurs. Some parts, like those in my dishwasher, decide not to work in the way God intended them. They're simply present, but have no functional role. Although God is faithful and will still accomplish His purpose regardless of these non-functioning pieces, it strains others working diligently in ministry. As a church, God has called us to work together for the same purpose to achieve the same goal even though He has gifted us differently. We need everyone working together in the church to glorify the Lord by building His kingdom through evangelism and discipleship. May we unite in fellowship—every participating together doing his or her part just as the Lord has called us so that we can bear fruit in ministry consistent with His character.



## ***Incorporate***

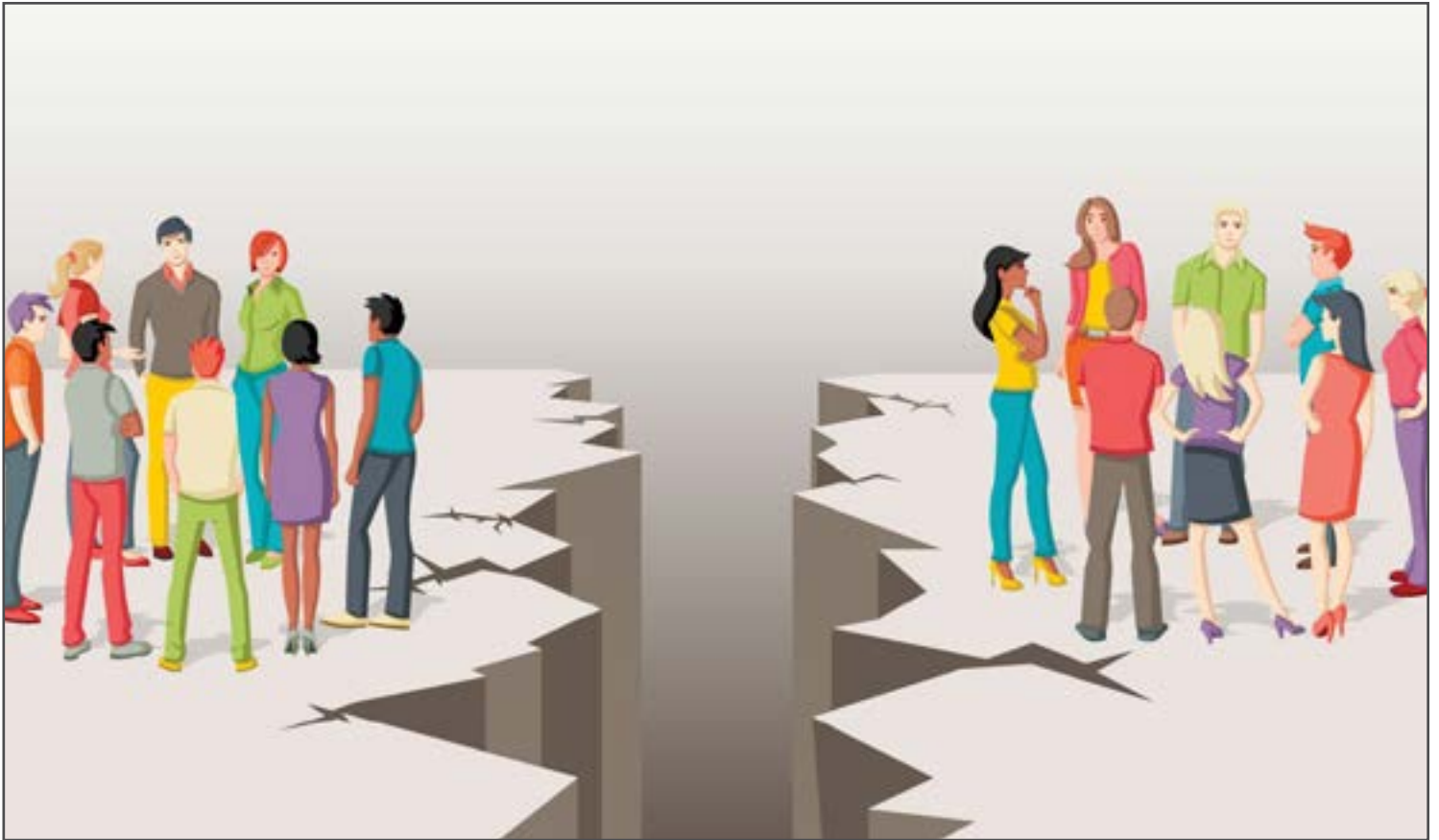
How would you characterize your service through the church? In what specific ways do you participate in the two fundamental purposes of the church: 1) sharing the gospel / making disciples and 2) discipling others while maturing in your own faith?

In what ways have you seen God give you grace to minister to others this week? What did God teach you through these instances?

In an increasingly isolated and disconnected culture, how can we be more effective as a church in participating in discipleship and ministry outside the corporate gatherings on Sundays and Wednesdays? Why is it important to do these two things daily?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*January 12, 2025*



# *United without Division*

## *1 Corinthians 1:10-17*

Focal Verse:

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

1 Corinthians 1:10

## Introduce

During my senior year of high school, my marching band received an invitation to play at the inauguration of Kentucky Governor Paul E. Patton. With our band featuring 200 winds and percussion, we combined with the two other smaller county bands for a total of 250 musicians. On a cold, yet sunny December day in Central Kentucky, we began marching in parade formation down US 60 toward its junction with Capital Avenue. To reach the State Capitol from the intersection, however, it required that we turn and cross a bridge spanning the formidable Kentucky River. Before making the turn and seeing the towering capitol rising over the bluegrass-covered hills in the distance, the directors signaled for the band to come to a complete halt.

In a highly unusual and unexpected move, the directors stopped everything that they had taught us to do in a parade! They stopped the cadence of the drums. They stopped us from marking time—keeping the beat by snapping our knees back and forth in rhythm. They even stopped us from marching in rhythm in straight lines and ordered us to



walk across the bridge at ease. As a highly trained and skilled regiment of musicians, we had never broken formation in any of our parade performances ever. So, the directors had to explain that marching in unison across a bridge could cause it to collapse. With everyone in step, the vibration had the potential to hit the right frequency and bring down the structure!

Some of you may find the story unbelievable or even ridiculous, thinking that bridges carry much greater weight from the vehicles that drive over them every day. While true, however, the vehicles don't act in unison. They drive at different speeds and in different manners, causing different vibrations which the framework of the bridge will absorb without incident. But bands or regiments of soldiers marching over a suspension bridge in unison pose a unique set of problems as the nineteenth-century citizens of England discovered. On April 12, 1831, a platoon of approximately sixty British soldiers marched in rank and file over the suspension bridge spanning

## Introduce

the Broughton Ford near the city of Manchester, England. As the soldiers marched in unison, the six-year-old bridge suddenly collapsed sending several of the men plummeting into the water. Although several were injured in the incident, no one died. It also led to the British Army to change its policy and order soldiers to “break step”—stop marching in unison—when crossing a bridge.

Whether we attribute such a catastrophic failure to nineteenth-century engineering standards or perhaps the inferior quality of the iron bolt holding the suspension cable in place that snapped, research has since proven it possible to bring down a suspension bridge simply by marching in step over it. In January 2004, the popular science show *MythBusters* on the Discovery Channel tested the plausibility of such an event happening. After their initial round of testing, they discovered their research methodology was fundamentally flawed. And when they retested it later that same year on a special episode titled “Myths Revisited,” they determined it was indeed possible, although not very likely, that a structurally sound bridge could collapse from the vibration of soldiers marching in unison over it.

On their own, individual vehicles and people have little effect on a bridge. Yet, when marching in unison, people of a much lighter weight than vehicles can effectively cause a bridge to collapse. Such a simple illustration as this demonstrates the power of working collectively by walking in unison with Christ in the church. When we walk in unity in the church as one, single body, we will collectively have a much greater impact on the culture with the help of Christ! This doesn’t mean that Christ can never use us as individuals to do extraordinary things, but rather it shows the value of working together to accomplish even greater things collectively in Christ than we could ever imagine or do on our own. Therefore, may we unite ourselves working together in Christ as His people putting aside any division so that we might accomplish the purpose to which He has called us.

Key  
Question

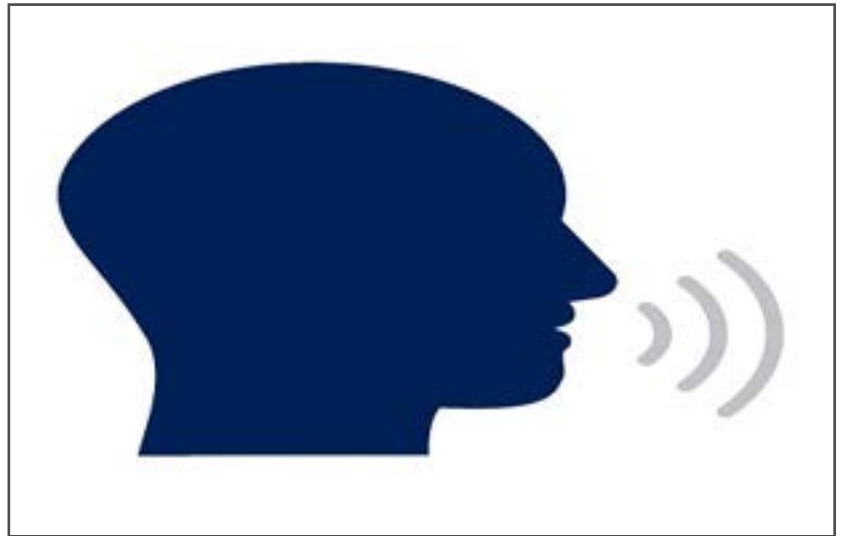
What examples can you cite about the power of working collectively as the church?

### 1 Corinthians 1:10

#### PURSUE UNITY IN CHRIST

After starting on a positive note by thanking God for graciously giving the Corinthians everything they need to minister, Paul quickly turns to the problem at hand within the church—**divisions** (v. 10). He **pleads with** them in **the name of Christ** to be unified in both what they **speak** and how they act. First, he implores them literally to **speak the same thing**. Many modern translations will either shorten this phrase simply to “agree” (ESV, NASB, RSV, and NET) or interpret it as “agree in what you say” (NIV and HCSB). In either case, Paul employs this phrase to call the Corinthians to adopt Christ’s perspective and see the world through His eyes rather than through their own selfish desires. They should not focus primarily on their own personal interests, but instead they should seek the will of the Lord which would have them look out for the interests of others and build a community that visibly displays its love for one another (Phil 2:3-4). A church can only accomplish this through Christ when every member is united in Him and adopts His same outlook.

Therefore, Paul qualifies this need for unity by highlighting the authority according to which he speaks—**by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**. This serves as their call to follow Christ’s example and imitate His character. Christ Himself never displayed selfishness nor did He ever seek personal gain. He laid



all these things aside to seek and fulfill the will of the Father—even though it cost Him greatly. In fact, Jesus declares, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). This propelled Him to serve rather than be served and give His life on the cross—the epitome of selflessness (Mark 10:45).

Specifically, though, what does it mean to **speak the same thing**? In verse 5, Paul has already acknowledged that God has “enriched” them in “all utterance and knowledge.” As we learned last week, the phrase “all utterance” literally means “in every word.” This refers to the gospel first and foremost—the testimony about Christ (1 Cor 1:6). They are to rely upon the Lord and proclaim His message about how to have

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eternal life. Therefore, they must preach Christ crucified and resurrected—the only source of life through faith! For this reason, Paul later reminds them, “And my speech (literally, word) and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4-5). We ought to use our speech then primarily to point people to Christ and the wisdom of God found in Scripture

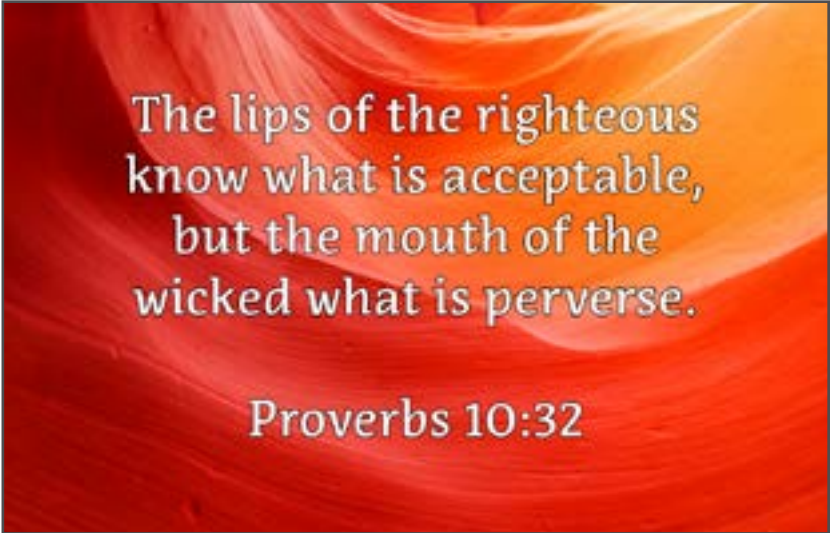
Question  
# 1

How does your speech reflect both the selflessness and love of Christ in your daily routine?

In addition to sharing the gospel, the Bible exhorts us to use our speech righteously in other ways as well. With our lips, we should give praise and direct our thanksgiving to the Lord, testifying to His provision and protection (Heb 13:15). We should also encourage and build up others rather than curse, seek to tear down, and destroy (Jas 3:10). However, this does not mean that we cannot offer correction when needed or that we cannot speak against obvious sin. On the contrary, Scripture commands us always to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). As a result, we must never engage in profane speech, whether cursing, telling dirty jokes, gossiping, or anything that may bring dishonor to the Lord. Instead, we should use our lips to teach the way of the Lord and proclaim His holy Word (Prov 16:23-24). Although we could add many more points here, the main one is that we should **all speak** righteously at all times in a way that honors Christ (Prov 10:31-32).

In our culture which pushes for unity, conformity, and acceptance of its core values, we must clearly define what it means to agree in our speech. Theoretically, the church can “**speak the same thing**” but not really have true unity if our words, ideas, and beliefs do not conform to the Lord. The church is not a democracy, but a theocracy. God

alone determines what is acceptable speech—not the culture. As the church, we cannot compromise. We cannot allow a popular majority to dissuade us from following



The lips of the righteous  
know what is acceptable,  
but the mouth of the  
wicked what is perverse.

Proverbs 10:32

and practicing what God Himself has declared. Therefore, we must always ask, “What has God said in Scripture about what I should believe, think, or say?” Therefore, true unity proceeds from following His Word collectively as His people without compromise. On the other hand, unity never comes by bowing to the popular demands of the culture no matter how many people may actually say the same thing!

Question  
# 2

In what areas have some churches compromised the integrity of their speech to meet the popular demands of the crowd?

Second, Paul implores them to put aside all **divisions** and be **joined together in the same mind**. We’ll address division much more in-depth in the next section. However, the term translated **divisions** is from where we get our word “schisms.” It signifies the tearing of a garment by pulling it in two directions. The phrase **joined together** also comes from a word which literally means knit **together**—here in terms of sewing the tear in the garment back **together**. Only Christ can overcome division; only He can heal in such a way that He can take groups with diverse backgrounds and knit them **perfectly together** into one community! Therefore, Paul bids them to have the **same mind** or perspective. They should elevate the things that have in common in Christ while downplaying their personal interests and goals. They are to be on the “**same**” side rather than stand in opposition to one another.

Question  
# 3

What kind of divisions do we see in the church today? What are the root causes of these divisions?

To have **the same mind** then centers around one’s attitude and lifestyle—both how we view life as well as how we live. In everything, we must think and live like Christ. Philippians 2:5 instructs us to “let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” “Mind,” in this verse, literally means our way of thinking. Thus, we are to view the world through Christ’s perspective which will transform the way that we relate to others and how we live in obedience to the Word of God. Even in 1 Corinthians 2:16, Paul reminds them, “For, ‘who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.’” In other words, it is foolishness and pure folly to live our lives thinking that we know best and can tell God what we need. We don’t instruct the Lord; He should be the One who instructs us. But many people attempt to




## Instruct

do just that. They tell God what they want and demand that He gives it to them. This type of thinking is backwards! A mind controlled by the Lord seeks His will and desires what He desires.

Third, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to have **the same judgment**. The word translated **judgment** is notoriously difficult to interpret in English. This isn't the typical Greek word for **judgment** in the sense of discernment, determining right from wrong, or hearing evidence in a case to

determine innocence or guilt. Rather, it has more of the meaning of advice or purpose. Translations, as a result, vary widely: "In the same judgment" (NKJV and NAS), "perfectly united in mind and thought" (NIV), and "in the same purpose" (RSV). Most likely with Paul having already urged them to be **perfectly knit together**, he is exhorting them to have the **same** purpose or intention rather than pulling in different directions according to their own preferences. Therefore, they must put aside their self-ambitions and be united in Christ to fulfill His purpose to build the church and proclaim the gospel.

Consequently, the Corinthians should do what is best for the group as Christ leads; they should not seek their own "rights or "privileges" and misuse the freedom that Christ has given them—which they are indeed doing. In fact, Paul challenges the church throughout the letter to remove such selfish ambitions in their lives and work cohesively together in Christ. They should not set their own agenda nor attempt to dictate their own path. Instead, they must look to the purpose Christ has established for them as individuals within the church! In Romans 12:10, Paul explains it this way, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." Therefore, we should not view our decisions in isolation as if they have no effect on others; we must view ourselves in relation to the body. Certainly, Christ cares about us as individuals. But at the same time, we have collectively become members of His body if we have a relationship with Him. Hence, we must now think and act in terms of the righteousness of Christ and the effect we have on His body.



*Let this mind be in you which  
was also in Christ Jesus*

*Philippians 2:5*

Question  
# 4

What is the purpose of this church? How would you evaluate your participation in that purpose?

## **1 Corinthians 1:11-13**

### **PUT ASIDE DIVISIONS**

Messengers from **Chloe's household**, perhaps where the church met in Corinth, brought Paul disturbing news about **contentions among** them (v. 11). These **contentions** have caused **divisions** and rifts in the church which have distracted them from their primary pursuit of worshiping the Lord and sharing the gospel. Such **divisions** have caused them to look inwardly and focus on their own desires and their own preferences. The nature of the disputes primarily centered around their spirit of competition and their personal preferences about the personality of the leader with whom they most associated—particularly the one who may have baptized them. This led groups to struggle for power, prestige, and position within the church. Although some in the church had problems with their theology whereby they abused their “freedom” in Christ to commit sinful acts (see chapters 5-6), the root of their division was competition to see who was the wisest and most spiritual.

We see this problem addressed by Paul throughout the letter. Instead of focusing on their own perceived knowledge and spirituality, they should preach Christ crucified and nothing else (1 Cor 2:1-2). They should not speak according to their own perceived wisdom which is “foolishness” to God; they are to follow His plan and live righteously which indicates true wisdom (1 Cor 1:26-31). Rather than comparing themselves to one another to see who is the wisest and most useful in the church, they must work together, surrendering completely to the Lord who alone is able to cause growth and help its members to mature spiritually (1 Cor 3:5-7). Unfortunately, the Corinthians evaluated themselves from an earthly perspective; in their eyes, they had already arrived at the top and displayed great maturity. Therefore, Paul derides them saying, “You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we might also reign with you” (1 Cor 4:8).



The Corinthians regarded themselves as spiritually superior to others. Perhaps, this sense of superiority made them later challenge Paul's God-given authority as an apostle (see 2 Corinthians). Here, however, we see that superiority on display in the

## Instruct

elevation of particular spiritual gifts and roles within the church (see chapters 12-14). Some abused the spiritual gifts which God had given to edify the church; they used these gifts, such as knowledge, prophecy, and speaking in tongues, to draw attention to themselves rather than honor Christ. Instead of using the gifts to impart the gospel as they were intended, individuals within the church competed for prominence, causing utter chaos in worship. Thus, the Corinthians divided themselves in terms of their perceived wisdom and knowledge, their wealth and social status from an earthly perspective, and their “spirituality” as evidenced in their abuse of some of the gifts—all to seek notoriety and power within the church at the expense of exalting and glorifying Christ.

Question  
# 5

In what ways do we see competition in the church today? How does such competition distract from the main goal of the church?

Now, Paul turns to address one specific area that has caused **divisions** among them. They have elevated their personal preferences and divided themselves into groups based on the personality of the leader. Some of them say, “**I am of Paul.**” While others say, “**I am of Apollos. I am of Cephas (Peter). I am of Christ**” (v. 12). Although a literal rendering of the Greek, these expressions in the context mean “I associate with” or “I follow” rather than a sense of possession that “I belong to.” Thus, each group has exalted an earthly leader based on their own perspective saying, “I follow Paul, Apollos, or Peter.” Since Corinth was a wealthy, educated metropolitan area with much international travel and trade, it attracted itinerate teachers and preachers from all over the Roman empire who would compete for students and finances, attempting to establish a following for themselves. So, the Corinthians likely adopted a familiar secular practice into the church and began following the particular leader who appealed most to them.

Unfortunately, many in the church today do the same thing.



They find leaders who suit their preferences. They will follow those who will tell them what they want to hear. In many cases, they want to be entertained or hear a message of “hope” apart the truth of Scripture. In many instances, they will blindly follow leaders with dynamic and charismatic personalities, but have no substance to their message because they find their styles and gimmicks appealing. We need only look to the celebrity and influencer culture on social media to see this on full display. Many, but not all, have no substance or truth to their message, but only their personal opinions. Yet, some people value and listen to them for trivial reasons simply because they are popular, good-looking, humorous, have an attractive personality, or know how to appeal to a crowd. We cannot allow such thinking to infiltrate the church—but in many cases it already has, so we need to get rid of it. We must collectively work together to exalt Christ in obedience to His will, proclaiming His Word and ministering to others.

Question  
# 6

What is the danger of following a person or personality rather than following Christ? What effect does this have on the church?

Although many people follow leaders who will tell them what they want to hear (2 Tim 4:3), **divisions** in the church can form for many other reasons too. Sometimes we may not even know they exist! Our modern term clique best describes the arbitrary **divisions** we can create in the church. People tend to gravitate to those who are like them—whether in personality, social background or status, intellect, shared hobbies, or much more. Even though there is nothing wrong with having close friends and spending time together doing the things we enjoy, a problem occurs, however, when we isolate ourselves and close our group. This can prove detrimental to the church because people fail to see the bigger picture of ministry where all groups work together—regardless of age, stage in life, or their life experiences. Some people, however, tend to hang out with smaller groups and never get to know anyone else in the church as a result. Small groups are important to cultivate connection and create intimacy, but we must also recognize the importance of working cohesively as an entire body to impact the world with the gospel and help the church to mature in Christ.

Question  
# 7

What do you do to cultivate relationships with others in the church outside of your closest friends?

## Instruct

Paul now asks a series of three rhetorical questions. The way they are written in the Greek indicates that they should each be answered “no.” Paul inquires whether **Christ is divided**, if he (Paul) was crucified for them, and if **they were baptized in his (Paul’s) name** (v. 13). Paul hopes to reiterate that no one group, no matter how “spiritual” they may perceive themselves, can possess Christ in the sense of excluding others based on earthly categories and expectations. Anyone who has a relationship with Christ belongs to Him and should obediently follow Him. This offer of salvation, based on Christ’s mercy, is extended to the whole world if only they would accept it. Christ does not discriminate; He does not divide people. He unites people through His blood by saving them from their sin and transforming them to live righteously. We all have that in common because only Christ can save! As Christians who serve the same Lord—the one and only true God—we should lay aside all divisions and distinctions to work together as He has equipped His body!

In the last two of these questions, Paul uses himself as an example to highlight the absurdity of following a person rather than Christ. He did not die for the Corinthians (or the world). Even if he had, it would have been a



useless sacrifice because of his own sin and imperfections (1 Tim 1:15). Only Christ can provide the perfect atoning sacrifice! Certainly, God has instilled leaders within the church to oversee it and keep it focused on Him. And we should listen to these leaders who seek the Lord, teach His Word faithfully, and keep the body unified in its focus of ministry. Yet, we all follow Christ and not the personality of the earthly leader, for He is the head of the body (Eph 1:22). The same applies to baptism. It does not matter who does the baptizing from an earthly point of view, but in whose **name** we are baptized (Matt 28:19; Rom 6:2-11; Col 2:12-15). Only Christ can raise us to walk in the newness of life; only Christ can give us wisdom which leads to an abundant life when we obey Him.

Question  
# 8

How can cliques in the church hinder ministry? Why is it often so difficult to detect cliques in the church?

## ***1 Corinthians 1:14-17***

### **PREACH THE GOSPEL**

To put the focus on Christ, Paul expresses thankfulness for baptizing only Crispus and Gaius (v. 14). Crispus is likely the leader of the local synagogue (Acts 18:8) and Gaius likely hosted Paul during his stay in the city (Rom 16:23). Paul is not downplaying the importance of baptism in obedience to the Lord's command as an outward symbol of the inner change in those who trust and follow Him, but he is merely thankful that many people could not mistakenly elevate him as the one who **baptized** them above Christ—**lest anyone should say that he had baptized in his own name** (v. 14). Thus, the focus should always be on Christ and not the one who baptizes! As John the Baptist rightly attests, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).



God also brought to remembrance one other **household** whom Paul had **baptized**, that of **Stephanas**, but beyond these two he cannot recollect any other whom he had **baptized** (v. 14). This leads Paul to conclude this section with the reason why he is glad to have only **baptized** a few. In his remarks, he also reveals the most important aspect of his calling—**Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the gospel** (v. 17). Even in this endeavor, Paul did not use human **words of wisdom**, but preached the cross undiluted as the means for salvation. In other words, Paul did not come with impressive words of rhetoric in an attempt to manipulate people and prey upon their emotions to gain a following (1 Cor 2:4); he allowed God to work, convict, and save through him. He rightly sees himself as God's tool which He uses to communicate. Therefore, like Paul, we must allow God to do His work in and through us, but we must also make ourselves available to be used by Him.

Our focus, above all, must be on Christ rather than our preferences, perspectives, and personal desires. When our focus is on Christ, we will allow Him to use us in any way He sees fit according to His Word and we will **preach the gospel** to all people

## *Instruct*

whom we meet. Let's not focus on human personalities or philosophies. Let us focus on the **gospel** which alone has the power to change. May we allow it to impact our lives in such a way that we always seek the Lord's will and we are always united without division, working together in His body to mature in Him and spread the **gospel** to the whole world!

Question  
# 9

How do you exalt Christ in your life and make sure the focus is on Him rather than you?

As we saw in the introduction, there is power in unity. When we walk together in unison as God's people according to the principles in His Word, we can have a powerful impact upon our culture. God has called us as "salt and light" to impact the culture through the transformed lives which He has given us through a relationship with His Son. Let's put aside anything that hinders our impact. May we resist arbitrary divisions in the church, but strive to achieve the same purpose with the same mind and perspective, speaking the same thing—the gospel without compromise. May we have the same goal, focusing not on our individual preferences or personalities but on the person of Christ. May we be united without division, seeking to fulfill the calling Christ has placed on our lives both individually and collectively as His people.



## *Incorporate*

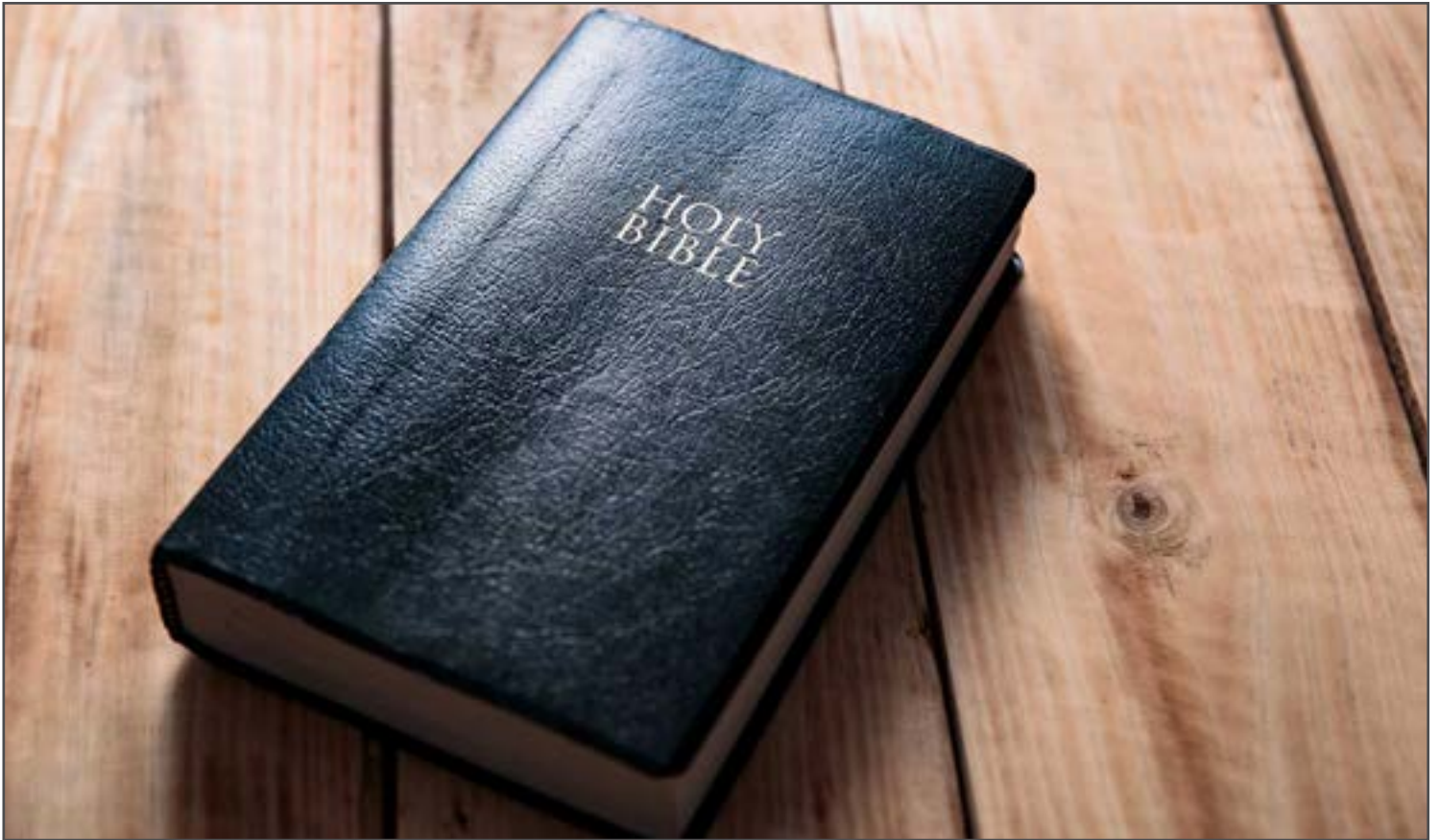
What kind schisms or divisions do you see in the church today? How do you prevent yourself from becoming subject to them? How do you pursue unity in Christ instead of division?

How can we promote unity in the church without compromising the truth of Scripture as some churches have done today?

How do you point people to Christ with your life? How do you put the focus on Him (and the gospel) rather than yourself?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*January 19, 2025*



# *United in Message*

## *Part 1*

### *1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5*

Focal Verse:

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

1 Corinthians 1:18

## Introduce

Several years ago with the boom of reality tv, programs which demonstrated survival techniques in various environments became popular. These shows would purportedly leave a host and camera crew in some of the most remote and inhospitable locations around the world with only a few items in a backpack or those which they could carry on their person. At every turn, they would face challenging terrain, dangerous wild animals, and perilous weather. Ultimately, those featured on the program would try to teach the audience at home how to find their way back to civilization safely. Along the way, these individuals would need to display a strong sense of self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and determination in order to survive. They would need to find ways to procure food, filter drinking water, build shelter, start fires, scale cliffs, and navigate other challenging natural barriers all while fending off deadly predators like bears or lions.



These programs inspired a sense of awe and wonder among their audiences who would vicariously place themselves in the same situation, hoping that they too would have the courage, mental capacity, and physical stamina to overcome and survive on their own. The drama and suspense left the audience wondering what they would have done to make it out alive had they found themselves in similar a circumstance. It also left them with a sense of accomplishment and achievement when the participants on the programs emerged victorious at the end of the episode. However, this euphoria quickly vanished as audiences discovered that these so-called “reality” shows were fake or scripted. Soon charges began swirling around some shows where the host would fly to the location, film the segment, and then be subsequently flown back to a hotel to spend the night. The episode did nothing more than manipulate the appearance that he had spent the night or even several days in the wilderness without receiving any kind of assistance or aid when in reality he hadn’t.

After the initial episodes aired, many of these programs subsequently included

## Introduce

disclaimers in the opening credits to prevent lawsuits. They acknowledged that the host was sometimes presented with situations or scenarios in order to “demonstrate” certain techniques. In other words, this legal lingo indicated that the producers staged, facilitated, and monitored the activities of the hosts. Moreover, these disclaimers also alluded to the fact that the hosts received help at times from the crew when faced with life-threatening situations. Even though the hosts of these programs undoubtedly had some degree of knowledge, skill, and physical conditioning to survive, in “reality” they were not as self-sufficient or self-reliant as they seemed! They constantly had help from others to ensure their safety.

In the “reality” of the world, God has not created us to be self-reliant, self-sufficient, and independent even though many people may unsuccessfully try. God has created us to rely and depend upon Him! Self-sufficiency leads us to adopt a prideful and arrogant spirit whereby we assume we know best; we have everything in our life figured out and under control on our own. We don’t need anyone to give us advice or tell us what to do because ‘we’ve got this.’ Such an attitude, however, omits God in our lives to our own detriment and demise. The Corinthians had to learn this lesson the hard way. They fancied themselves as wise, intelligent, and gifted. They even viewed themselves as wealthy and in need of nothing. So, Paul had to remind them that they had nothing apart from Christ. They owed everything to Him. When we unite behind the gospel message, we can begin to understand how much we truly depend upon the Lord—not just for our salvation, but for everything in our lives!

Key  
Question

In what ways does self-reliance or self-sufficiency sometimes manifest itself in our relationship with the Lord?

### 1 Corinthians 18-25

#### THE FOUNDATION OF WISDOM

Having just rebuked the Corinthians for the divisions in their church focused on the personality of the preacher rather than the person of Christ, Paul now strives to show them what they have in common through **the message** of the gospel. The gospel should unite them instead of divide them because in Christ they all have received a second chance! When He saved them, Christ graciously gave them not only the promise of an eternal life to come, but also the promise of a transformed life which they could now live in Him. At first, we may not readily see the connection in English between verses 17 and 18, but Paul actually continues the same line of thinking throughout both. Previously, he noted that he did not preach the gospel “with words of wisdom”—literally wisdom of word (logos). Now, he endeavors to explain the result of his preaching **the message**—literally the word (logos)—**of the cross** (v. 18).

In other words, Paul doesn't peddle “religion” or promote a human philosophy based on man's collective wisdom about how to obtain life. He's not some slick snake oil salesman using deceitful words to push his personal agenda and gain followers by telling people something that sounds appealing to their ear (2 Tim 4:3-4). On the contrary, he has delivered divine revelation directly from the Lord Himself (see Gal 1:12-17). The message of the gospel communicates God's Word—what He has done on our behalf so that we can have a relationship with Him through the death (i.e., cross) and resurrection of His Son. Religion, however, attempts to tell us what we must “do” to earn favor with God and inherit eternal life by our own power (Mark 10:17-22). Simply put, we can never “do” enough. We can never be “good” enough no matter what we may do (Rom 3:10-11, 23; Isa 64:6-7). In this way, mere “religion” is of no effect (1 Sam 15:22). We can participate in all the rituals and rites, but still not have life (Isa 1:11-20). On the other hand, the gospel describes how God came to redeem us and paved the way so that we could have life through His Son. It describes what God has done for us because we did not have the



## Instruct

power or capability to do it on our own. Thus, God seeks a personal relationship based on complete surrender rather than meaningless religious ritual done with an unrepentant heart.

In our culture, we encourage people with the phrase, “You’ve got this,” so that they persist, endure, and don’t throw in the towel. Sometimes, we ourselves may even say, “I’ve got this,” and refuse help for a project we feel that we can tackle successfully on our own. Religion, in one sense, is man’s attempt to tell God, “We’ve got this”; we don’t need His help. But in the end, salvation or eternal life isn’t something that we can attain on our own. We need God! To help us understand, consider how everything we own breaks down and decays no matter how well we care for it. Appliances, vehicles, electronics, computers, and the like—it doesn’t matter. We can keep the item clean, service it regularly, and even baby it, but even so one day it will need repair and then eventually it will need to be replaced entirely.

As a skilled handyman, we may sometimes be able to service the item and repair it on our own. While this may delay the decay, it doesn’t prevent it. One day, the item will be beyond repair. We may try calling an expert technician, but not even he can do anything to revive it. When giving us the prognosis, he will lament, “There’s nothing I can do. You’ll need a whole new unit.” Mere religion functions much this same way. It only hides our problems without ever changing our hearts (Heb 8:7-13). Therefore, it can’t prevent our decay or circumvent death. Religion can’t “fix” our problem because it cannot re-make us into an entirely new person. But a relationship with Christ can. When we turn from our sins and trust in Christ, we die to our old way of life; all the old things pass away and we become a new creation in Him (2 Cor 5:17). The power of Christ transforms us from unrighteous to righteous and from dead to alive.

Question  
#1

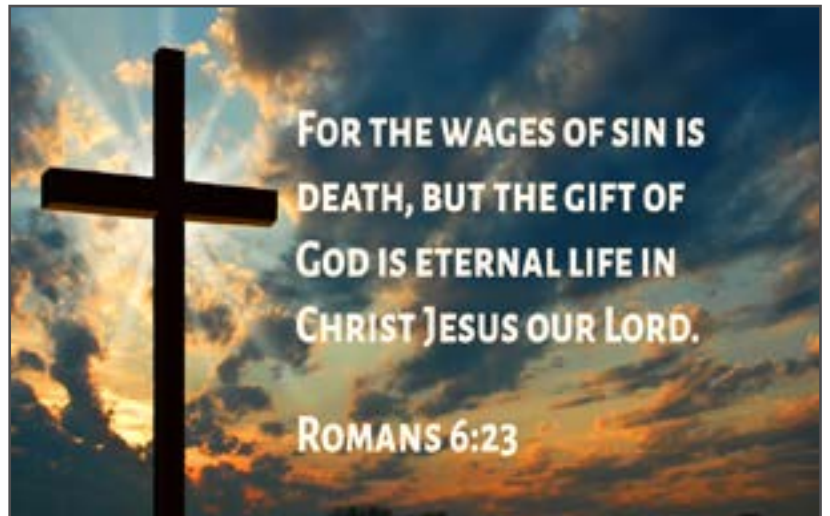
How does our culture confuse religion with what it means to have a relationship with Christ?

Throughout this section, Paul contrasts God’s wisdom with human wisdom. He does not attack or downplay all wisdom, but rather exposes the delusion and folly of carnal human wisdom which leads to the rejection of God. Consequently, Paul outlines two responses to the gospel. **To those who** have rejected it and **are perishing, the message is foolishness. To those who** have accepted Christ and **are being saved,**

however, **it is the power of God**. To understand why the world views the gospel as foolish, we need only look to the central component of its **message: the cross**. Along with the resurrection, the **cross** plays the most pivotal role in our salvation. Christ had to die on our behalf. A perfect, sinless sacrifice had to take our place; He had to receive the punishment for our sin upon Himself so that He might impart His righteous life to us (Rom 6:23). Therefore, Hebrews 9:22 reminds us, “And without shedding of blood there is no remission” of sin.

Yet, the world, which prides itself on its wisdom and ingenuity, views **the message of the cross** as **foolishness**—the Greek word from whence we get our word moronic. According to human logic, **the cross** signifies dishonor and defeat, certainly not **power** and victory. The Romans in particular used the cross

as a means to subdue and vanquish their enemies. As a public spectacle, crucifixion became a warning to all who dared cross Rome and challenge its authority. In addition to the torture, **the cross** brought shame and reproach upon the person sentenced to hang there. So, the world surmises that **the cross** cannot bring life. But they make these assumptions based upon mere outward appearances. From Jesus’ trials, we know that He hung there as an innocent Man; He had no shame or dishonor except that of our own which He bore on our behalf. Pilate admitted as much when he exclaimed, “I find no fault in this Man” (Luke 23:4). In response to his fellow thief hanging on the other side of Jesus who mocked the Savior, the other thief acknowledged that they had both sinned, whereas he explained that “this Man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:41).



Question  
# 2

In what ways does the world even today try to minimize or dismiss the cross?

For those of us who have a relationship with Christ, we assuredly know that **the cross** leads to life. Thus, Paul here describes it as the **power of God**. Generally, we tend to view the concept of **power** as strength or might. God certainly displays strength and might over His creation at times. But the term **power** in this context more accurately



## Instruct

means effectiveness or ability. Above, I described “mere religion” as being “of no effect”; it doesn’t have the ability or **power** to save—it’s ineffective! On the other hand, **the cross** as emblematic of Christ’s death is powerful because it effectively transforms! In Galatians 2:20, Paul explains this transformation best: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

When calling technical support, the advisor on the other end usually asks an infuriating question, “Is the computer plugged in? Are you sure it’s getting power?” Why do they ask such an aggravating question? They do so probably because many foolish people never check the most obvious solution to the problem in the first place. To be effective or work, a computer must have an uninterrupted supply of **power**. If not, no matter what we may do or how hard we may try, we will never get it to boot up or load any program. We must have it plugged in to the right **power** source! Our salvation functions similarly. Our lives must be plugged in to the right **power** source who is able to save! For Jesus Himself even says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). To have eternal life, we must follow God’s plan through **the cross** of Christ which is the only effective way to attain salvation. No matter what we may try, to whom we may listen, or what philosophy we may espouse, nothing can ever effectively save us except God’s designated plan through the Son He sent to redeem us. God’s plan is the only one that works!



Rather unusually to our ears, Paul speaks of **those who are being saved** rather than those who are (present tense) or even were (past tense) saved. As such, he speaks of our salvation as an on-going, continuous action. It isn’t something that only happened to us in the distant past, but it continually influences the way we live every day. Salvation, therefore, has an “already,” “but-not-yet” component to it. Through Christ, God has *already* given us life and the assurance of eternal life spent with Him one day. We have nothing to fear; we can count on God fulfilling His promise to us. On the other

hand, we have *not yet* been fully conformed to the image of His Son. In other words, we must guard against temptation because as we live in the physical world where we are still subject to making mistakes and sinning. In 1 John 3:2, the Apostle puts it this way, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” While we cannot ever lose our salvation, we must constantly surrender ourselves to the guidance of the Spirit and guard against the temptation of following our own desires. We must strive daily to imitate Christ in every way—a process which requires maturation and growth.

Although not a perfect illustration, think of the “already;” “but-not-yet” component of salvation like baking a cake. First, we assemble all the ingredients we need: flour, butter, milk, eggs, sugar, and any other ingredient depending on the type of cake. Second, we follow the directions precisely and mix all these ingredients together in a big bowl before pouring the batter into a cake mold. At this point, we could call it a “cake.” After all, it already has all the necessary ingredients which are present in the right quantities. But it’s not yet in its final form. It won’t fully become the right consistency until we bake it. Our life in Christ functions much in this same way. We already have all the necessary qualities, fruit, and giftedness we need to live a righteous life the moment we accept Christ as our Savior. But because we have not yet been made perfect, we will struggle with consistency in living out our salvation at times. Only when Christ returns or calls us home will we become the perfect consistency in Him without sin and conformed to His holiness.

To support his conclusion about our dependence upon God for our salvation, Paul appeals to Isaiah 29:14: **“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”** Paul’s point in quoting Isaiah becomes clear when we examine this verse in the larger context of Scripture. Throughout the Old Testament—and particularly during the time of Isaiah in the eighth century BC— Israel encountered problem after problem whenever they began to regard



## Instruct

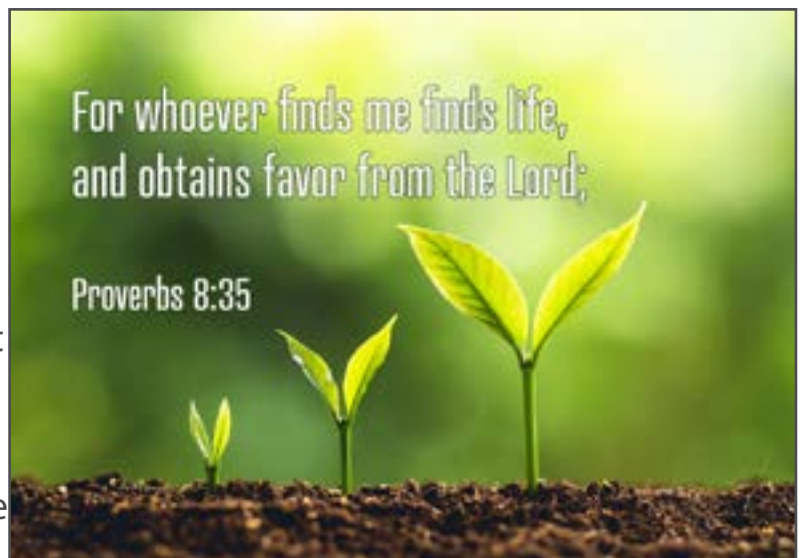
themselves as self-sufficient. They either abandoned God altogether (Judges 17:6) or they participated in meaningless, ritualistic religious rites and sacrifices while they devised in their hearts to engage in unholy activity (Isa 1:11-20; 5:18, 20). Thus, they said one thing with their lips through their phony “religious” service, but then they lived corruptly and hypocritically lacking righteousness and integrity. They thought they could fool God with their fake worship! Thus, Isaiah 5:21 perhaps summarizes their predicament best: “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.”

Question  
# 3

In what ways can people fool themselves when it comes to the spiritual?

Scripture has much to say about the true source of **wisdom**. **Wisdom** isn't some mere academic endeavor where scholars and experts confer on the best course of action based upon attained human knowledge. Nor does it come solely from mankind's collective experiences where we have learned by trial and error over the years—in other words commonsense or street smarts. True **wisdom** comes from God. Consequently, Proverbs 1:7 reminds us, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (see also Psalm 111:10; Prov 9:10). The **wisdom** that mankind has gained over the years may have somewhat improved our lives physically through certain inventions and it may have even extended our lives through certain medical advancements. Yet, this **wisdom** only delays the inevitable—death. It cannot prevent it or overcome it. Man may find a cure for cancer one day, but death will still reign in the world because of the sin to which we subjected it from the beginning. Only God's **wisdom** can effectively deal with sin and death once-and-for-all through Christ!

In our world, many people may not outrightly deny the existence of God like atheists do, but they live as if He does not exist. They may invoke His title or name and even talk about a “higher power” from time to time, but their lives show no evidence of a personal relationship



with the Lord God through Christ! Many people, even some Christians, go about their daily lives without ever seeking God through prayer or Scripture (Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3). They have a superficial understanding of who He is and little regard for the consequences of their actions until something happens directly to them. They only call upon the Lord after they've come to their wits end. They've tried everything else on their own and nothing has worked. And even then, they often call upon the Lord only to complain or criticize the circumstances in their lives rather than repent and truly seek Him. Such a life which disenfranchises the Lord and treats disrespectfully is as equally, if not more, foolish than an atheist who denies the existence of God altogether.

Question  
# 4

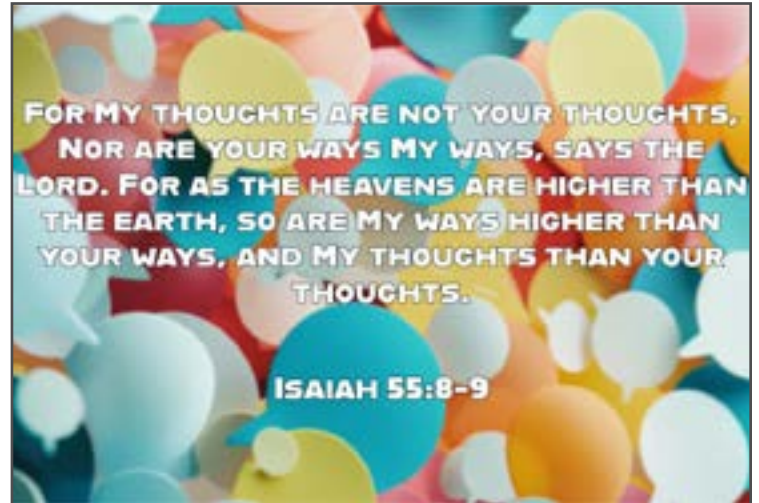
Even though we may claim that we know God, in what specific ways do people live as if there is no God? In other words, how do people omit God from their lives?

In verse 20, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions to underscore the point that all of mankind's collective wisdom amounts to mere **foolishness** in the sight of the Lord. He asks, "**Where is the wise, where is the scribe, and where is the debater?**" The first designation, **wise**, represents those abstract, deep thinkers, like philosophers who ponder the mysteries of the universe in regard to life's most persistent questions. The second term, **scribe**, connotes experts in the law; Jewish people would respectfully call their rabbis or teachers scribes. Today, we might call them scholars or academicians as some translations (NLT), but the term really describes what we would call a lawyer. Thus, expert in the law fits the context here best. The term translated debater or **disputer** serves a more general purpose to tie both groups together. Used only here in the New Testament, the word debater pictures an orator or teacher using his rhetorical skills to persuade people to follow his teaching or philosophy—sort of like an influencer today.

In all three groups, people sought honor by placing themselves in positions of prestige, power, and influence. They self-identified as experts in their fields, pointing to their personal accomplishments and accolades. Even our own society turns to these so-called educated, intelligent people because they seemingly have all the answers. Therefore, people regularly come to them for advice and help. As a result, many of so-called experts begin to see themselves as self-sufficient. Since they believe

## Instruct

that they have all the answers to life's most crucial questions, they surmise they don't need God! So, by way of a final rhetorical question, Paul condemns their faulty perception of themselves along with their flawed understanding of the world: "**Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?**" In other words, he indicates that God has shown their so-called human **wisdom** as flawed and their expertise as phony. God has exposed them as frauds! While the world may come to them for advice, these three groups have nothing to say before God. They can only stand there speechless, confused and confounded by God's simple **wisdom** which even a child can understand. They have nothing to offer the Lord. They have no **wisdom** or advice which can change the trajectory of their lives; only Christ can do that.



The phrase **made foolish** literally means to "make a fool of" and typically refers to a person of high status or importance who has been exposed as a fraud. Today, this would be like many people who embellish their resumes to seem more qualified for a better position. They present themselves as experts, but in reality they do not have the necessary qualifications or skills to do the job. With God, we cannot bolster our resume so to speak and present ourselves as a "good" person—that is morally better than the sinful person who we truly are (Isa 59:1-2; Rom 3:10, 23). In the end, God will reveal their heart and motives. He exposes those who take pride in their own self-achievements as frauds. Everything we have, including our **wisdom**, comes from the Lord. Apart from Him, therefore, whoever attempts to live independently and reckons himself as **wise** is in actuality a fool. This anticipates Paul's condemnation of the Corinthians in 3:18-23 where he specifically warns, "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise" (1 Cor 3:18).

Paul speaks harshly to the Corinthians here because some in the church have begun to envision themselves as wise and self-sufficient. They believe that they have everything in life under control. Since they control their own destiny, they believe that they have everything in life under control. Since they control their own destiny, they believe that they can act however they want—even immorally. Such an understanding

of salvation is short-sighted and misses the point. Christ has indeed saved us, but He has also transformed us into a new person who should seek to live righteously with integrity after the pattern He Himself established. Through the work of the gospel, therefore, God has made the so-called **wise** in our society who hold positions of high esteem look utterly silly and foolish. Sometimes we hear the phrase “too smart for their own good.” This appropriately fits here. These highly educated people overthink the simple message of the gospel: grace. In Christ, God will forgive anyone no matter what he has done if only he would repent (1 John 1:9). However, the world with all its supposed **wisdom** makes the gospel more complicated than it really is.

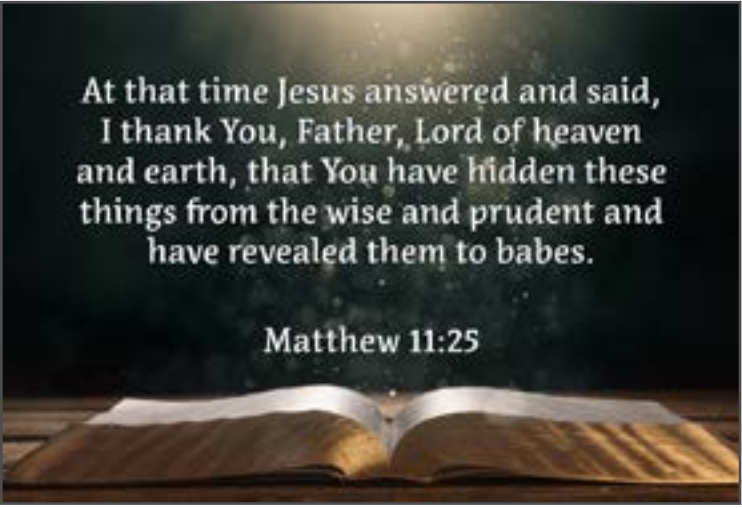
Question  
# 5

In what ways does our world tend to overthink the gospel?

Yet, God has made the gospel so simple that a child can understand and respond (see Matt 11:25; 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; 2 Tim 3:15). However, adults, especially highly educated ones, often have a hard time comprehending it because they think there must be more to it. It can't be that easy. So, they add requirements. They surmise that we must earn salvation through religious ritual, good works, or by being a good person. But this entirely misses the point and upends God's gracious plan. Through their own supposed **wisdom** and logic, they have corrupted God's message! Based upon God's **wisdom** revealed both in the written Word (the Bible) and the living Word (Christ), salvation is a gift freely given to whoever accepts it by

faith through repentance (Rom 10:13). For this reason, Paul explains that we cannot **know God** through mere human **wisdom** (v. 21). Because human **wisdom** has its limitations, God had to reveal Himself and save His creation by His own **power** through His own Son. Therefore, the **wisdom** of God, which seems like **foolishness** to men, is truly the only means of salvation for the world.

Only through the revelation which God has given us in Scripture that details His plan of salvation through Christ can we understand who God is and how we can have



At that time Jesus answered and said,  
I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven  
and earth, that You have hidden these  
things from the wise and prudent and  
have revealed them to babes.

Matthew 11:25

## Instruct

a relationship with Him. The Holy Spirit then works in concert with His written Word to help us interpret and apply it correctly (2 Pet 1:19-21). If we rely on human **wisdom**, we would distort the true image of God by attempting to re-create Him in accordance with our own ideals and understanding. And many religions and belief systems prominent in our world today have done just that. Rather than seek to understand who God truly is and how He functions in this world, many people envision God the way they want Him to be and demand that He responds according to their own desires and expectations. But God did not leave His **wisdom** and plan open to interpretation. On the contrary, He revealed the exact means of salvation through **the cross** because He knew men's tendency to view things from his own perspective, making a mess of things. Therefore, God didn't leave us guessing or allow our personal opinion to determine our fate. He sent His Son to show us the way and provide life for us through His death.

Question  
# 6

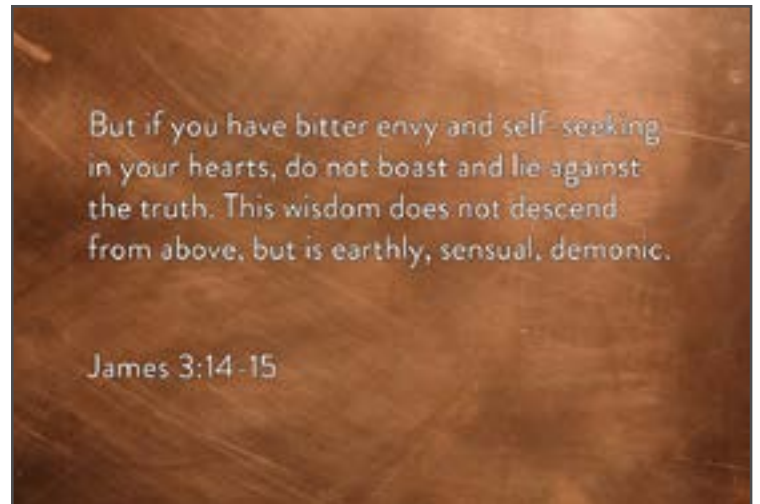
In what ways does our society attempt to re-create God after their own image or understanding?

After explaining the error in their thinking, Paul now outlines the reasons for their unbelief. The **Jews request a sign** (v. 22). The **Greeks**, or Gentiles, on the other hand, **seek wisdom**. To the **Jews**, God had already imparted **wisdom** through the Scripture; He had told them specifically who the Messiah would be and what He would come to do, yet they still sought a "**sign**" as confirmation (see Matt 12:38-42; 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-12; John 7:3-4). The Jews sought a **sign** because they had a misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of the Messiah. They wrongly sought someone who would deliver them politically by establishing an earthly kingdom (John 18:33-38) and bless them physically (John 6:26). Thus, the **Jews** demanded signs according to their own set of expectations. Yet, when God gave them an actual **sign** through Jesus' resurrection from the dead proving Him to be the Messiah, they missed it! When we come to God with our own set of expectations and ideas, we often miss Him at work in the world around us because we get tunnel vision. We only look for the things we want to see and not what God has actually revealed to us about Himself!

Question  
# 7

How do our expectations sometimes actually cause us to miss God and the work that He wants to do in the world around us?

In contrast to the **Jews** who demanded a **sign**, the Gentiles sought **wisdom**. Because they had a love for learning and a thirst for knowledge, the **Greeks** would read and study widely. As a result, they would adopt and adapt beliefs from various cultures into their own, particularly in a large, cosmopolitan city like Corinth. Like a proverbial buffet of **wisdom**, many ancients would pick and choose from those beliefs which appealed to them most or they considered most beneficial to advance their cause. Our own culture functions very much in this same way today. Our "**wisdom**" is primarily guided by our opinions and personal preferences influenced by the different worldviews we consume each day. Therefore, to its own detriment, our culture rejects absolute truth in favor of what they term "my truth" or "your truth." The **wisdom** the world espouses is then designed to put the individual in the most favorable position for what it identifies as "success." Yet, God in His wisdom, says success comes through death—first of all, the death of Christ on our behalf, but second, our own death to our old, sinful way of life. To the world, this makes no sense. It seems absurd and foolish to think we can attain any sort of victory through death.



To conclude this section, Paul describes the reception of the gospel—**Christ crucified**—among these two groups. Both unequivocally rejected it albeit for two different reasons. To the Jesus, the crucifixion was **a stumbling block** (v. 23). We get our modern word scandal from the one here translated **stumbling block**. Although with a slightly different nuance, the Jews regarded the cross as scandalous. To them, it proved Jesus' guilt and signified His moral failure because He was convicted and executed as a common criminal. Deuteronomy 21:23 even specifies, "For he who is hanged [on a tree] is accursed by God." But the Jews as a whole did not understand that Jesus became that curse for us. We deserved to die because of our sin, but Jesus in His perfection took our place. In Galatians 3:13, Paul explains, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by having become a curse for us." The Jews only looked at the circumstantial evidence basing their judgment on the way things appeared outwardly, so they drew the wrong conclusion.



## Instruct

As a child, my mother accused me of a crime I did not commit. My sister had plugged the sink in the bathroom and turned on the water which subsequently flooded all the way into the carpeted hallway. My room happened to be next to the bathroom so I went to check on all the commotion. After arriving at the scene, my sister bolted like lightning leaving me standing next to the destruction. When my mother came, I tried to explain what had transpired, but all the evidence seemed to point to my guilt. Trying to plead with my mother, she retorted, “Your sister is too young to do something like this.” And I promptly got punished. Based on appearances alone, my mother assumed my guilt. But later, she discovered my sister had indeed been the culprit when she felt both our pant legs. Mine had remained dry, but my sister’s were sopping wet. Although my mom did apologize to me, I already had suffered her wrath from something I didn’t actually do based on circumstantial evidence and outward appearance.



Although I am admittedly imperfect and had a hand in many other devious things in my life, this story demonstrates the error the Jews made with Jesus. From outward appearance alone, everything pointed to Jesus’ guilt. To the Jew, Jesus got what He deserved. But, in this case, the outward appearance and the so-called evidence were misleading, causing them to draw the wrong conclusion. As a perfect sacrificial Lamb, Jesus hung on the cross not because of His own sins, but because of ours. Through His death, He gave life to us. To the world, this seems outlandish and even foolish. But to those who are called it is **Christ the power of God** (v. 24). At some point in life, we’ve probably all made similar assumptions which have caused us to draw the wrong conclusions. When it comes to spiritual matters, however, we must exercise extreme caution. Rather than draw our own conclusions based on the way things seem to us, we need to hear God speak. We need to know what He has said in His Word.

Question  
# 8

How can assumptions and drawing conclusions based on our own perceptions cause us to misinterpret God’s plan for us or misunderstand who God truly is?

The **Greeks** simply viewed the gospel as **foolishness** or non-sense. Life, they wrongly assume, does not come through death. To the Gentile, the cross contradicts logic. According to their limited understanding of the world, people do not live after they die; they do not bodily rise from the grave. So, to them, death through the cross was the end of the story. Jesus' life ended in defeat rather than victory. For this reason, the cross also contradicts the world's self-centered sentiment of gaining an advantage for themselves. It was a picture of self-debasement, humiliation, and weakness—not glory, victory, and strength. One does not gain an advantage through death, but rather a personal display of power and strength based upon wealth, status, and military might. Many people today hold this same view of Jesus and His death! Because of their limited perspective, they cannot see how Jesus' death gives them any life or advantage in life. Or, even worse, they twist the gospel to where it focuses on prosperity through health, wealth, and status.

Whereas the gospel is a stumbling block to some and foolishness to others, **Christ** is the **power of God** to those of us whom He has saved (v. 24). As we will come to understand more during our study of 1 Corinthians, Christ, not the individual believer (1 Cor 1:10-17), is the focus and center of the church. **The power of God**, therefore, is the ability to be effective in the role which God has called us. Through Christ and the spiritual gifts He has given us, we can serve God effectively in this local church. Thus, our salvation is not primarily about what we gain or receive, but about what we can give. We must give our lives in full surrender to the Lord who has given His physical life for us through His death on the cross. Therefore, we must give up our personal agenda and pursuit of success according to our own standards and we must adopt His. To be effective and see growth in the church, we must adopt His agenda and pursue success according to God's terms which means we are faithful in every area in which He has called us to participate.

Question  
# 9

According to God's definition of success, how should we evaluate the effectiveness of a ministry?

The world, especially the West, values independence and self-sufficiency. Many believe that knowledge leads to power and can lead us to take control of our own destiny. Truthfully, however, God created us for dependence upon Him. The only knowledge and wisdom which can lead to life come from Him. People desperately search for the “truth” and they continually seek after “wisdom,” but they never find it because they look in all the wrong places. Rather than seek the wisdom God offers in His Word, particularly through the gospel, many people seek wisdom from corrupted human sources. Wisdom and “truth” when dependent upon a human perspective will always be flawed. This is the problem of “religion.” Religion contains man’s thoughts and perspectives whereas the Bible contains God’s divine plan and inerrant Word. The only way we as human beings can be united is through the message of the gospel that God has given us. As a church, may we always preach, teach, and communicate the truth directly from Scripture. May we never add our own understanding based on our personal preferences or opinions, but rather may we hear what God has said and apply it in our lives.

## *Incorporate*

How do people view the cross and the crucifixion of Christ today?



How do you see the power (effectiveness) of God displayed through your life daily? In other words, to what fruit can you point to show God working through your life? In what ways can you personally be more effective?

How do you see the power (effectiveness) of God displayed through the church as a whole? In what ways can we be even more effective?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*January 26, 2025*



# *United in Message*

## *Part 2*

### *1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5*

Focal Verse:

"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

1 Corinthians 2:2

## Introduce

Unless we have served in the United States Navy or worked in a bustling port along the coast, most of us have probably never paid much attention to how modern ships navigate the harbor and dock safely. Busy ports around the world have hundreds of ships entering and exiting every day—most without incident. As they do, the crews and passengers of these behemoths encounter narrow shipping lanes, shallow waters, hazardous natural features like sandbars and reefs, and man-made structures like bridges. Each port, however, differs substantially and presents its own unique set of challenges. Although crews are highly trained and most ships have advanced technology that greatly assists in navigation, these vessels still need a local expert to come aboard to guide them safely through the harbor.

While standing on the deck of a cruise ship watching a port come into view, we perhaps may have noticed a tiny tugboat that came alongside the vessel to guide it. But most passengers are rarely aware that a “pilot” has also



come aboard the bridge to give the captain and crew specific directions about how to maneuver. Allan Post, Deputy Superintendent of the Texas A&M Maritime Academy, describes pilots as “local experts usually certified by the state or federal government to provide advice to the master [i.e., captain] of the vessel as to how to control the vessel, safely and adequately through the pilotage waters.”\* As experts, pilots consequently know everything about their particular harbor. They know where the dangers lurk. They know how the currents and tides flow. They know when ships can pass safely given the rapidly changing weather conditions. Without the pilot, the ship’s crew would have a difficult, if not impossible time, entering and exiting a harbor safely—even with all their advanced technology and training. They still need an experienced guide to show them the way!

Jesus functions much like a pilot in our lives. As our omniscient and omnipotent Creator, He knows the way well. He knows every obstacle that we will ever face as well as the course we ought to take to overcome it without becoming shipwrecked so to speak. Not only has He provided the way for us to have life through His sacrificial death,

## Introduce

but He also came to show us the way to navigate life successfully with His help. He doesn't barge in, take control, and make demands. He has given us instruction through His written Word as to how we should conduct ourselves. As a result, we are responsible to follow the plan He has charted for us. Just like a captain and crew, we could try to navigate life on our own, but this would be foolish since we have an Expert by our side to show us the way!

Key  
Question

In what ways does Jesus function as a “pilot” in your life? What areas have you not fully surrendered into His control or sought His advice?

## In Reference



*\*Allan Post, “How Captains and Harbor Pilots Safely Guide Ships into Port,” The Conversation (March 26, 2024), available from [today.tamu.edu](http://today.tamu.edu).*



### 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

#### THE FOLLY OF HUMAN WISDOM

Speaking with Peter about “who can then be saved,” Jesus explains, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:26-27). Paul expresses that same sentiment here in our passage of focus this week. By showing that God is wiser and stronger than men (v. 25), Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Lord can do the impossible when it comes to providing eternal life to sinful people. Only God can save us through Christ; we cannot save ourselves through our own wisdom or strength. For this reason, he urges the Corinthians to contemplate their **calling** (v. 26). In this context, **calling** refers to their salvation by faith through grace and not their vocation or their giftedness used in service. We often view our **calling** as something we do, like teaching, preaching, serving, or evangelizing (i.e., missions), but here it refers to who we have become in Christ. God has called us to abandon our old way of life—that is turn from our sins—in order to have a relationship with Him.

When viewed strictly as a vocation, our **calling** can often foster a sense of superiority, inspire boasting, and create a sense of imbalance because we tend to place more value or afford more honor to some positions than others. Although unwarranted in Christ because every area of

service is vital and seeks to fulfill the same purpose of glorifying Him and building His church, we later learn that the Corinthians have done just that; they have puffed themselves up with pride based on their perceived status in the community (1 Cor 12:22-25). So, Paul must remind them that we are all on equal footing in terms of salvation. We all come from the same position as sinners in the need of a Savior. Hence, Paul points out **that not many are wise according to** human standards, **not mighty**, and **not** of noble birth. According to the world’s perspective, they hadn’t attained the right degrees (education), didn’t have the right credentials, or belong to the right

But He said, “The things  
which are impossible with  
men are possible with God.”  
Luke 18:27

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professional guilds. They didn't hold positions of power and authority in society. They had no influence upon the affairs of others. They didn't come from the wealthy upper class. They were neither born into wealth or royalty. The majority of the Corinthians lived an ordinary existence as blue collar workers struggling to support their families from day to day. They blended into the masses and impressed no one!

Because most of the Corinthians had not come from the educated, wealthy upper class having positions of great esteem in society, and even if they had, Paul reiterates that they owe everything to God. On their own, they had accomplished nothing; they had no way of escaping the penalty of death for their sins. All the accolades and achievements they had accrued in life couldn't impress the Lord and earn their salvation. They had to depend upon God's grace and follow His plan through Christ in order to attain eternal life. In essence, God had taken a common, ordinary group of individuals who were nobodies in the eyes of the world and made them somebodies in Christ. He made them joint-heirs with His Son, giving them the riches of a life spent serving Him (Phil 4:19)! Consequently, we have no room for arrogance, pride, or boasting in our walk. We must realize where we would be if Christ had not saved us.

Question  
# 1

How does the world define success? How does God define it?

Fortunately, God knows our limitations and weaknesses so He has counteracted them through the power and wisdom displayed in Christ. God understands the propensity of man to overestimate his own ability (see also Rom 12:3). As a whole, we often view ourselves as more intelligent, more capable, and more powerful than we truly are. Even though we may consider ourselves able, God knows that we can never be good enough to earn our salvation by good works! We would fail. So, from the beginning, He eliminated good works on our part as a means of salvation. Therefore, He Himself provided the only way that we could be reconciled with Him. Thus, Christ did the work on our behalf through His death on the cross. He completed the requirement for us because He knew we couldn't do it ourselves.

A few years ago, I took my parents with me on vacation to Yellowstone National Park. We spent a couple of days on the northside exploring the beautiful mineral formations of the Minerva Terrace near the park's headquarters in Mammoth Hot Springs. Over the years, the region's hot springs had deposited these minerals in

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crystalized formations of pristine white which looked like waterfalls of rock. Bacteria living within the water flowing from the hot springs added shades of vibrant color to the brilliant white backdrop. Situated about 7,000 feet in elevation, a rather level boardwalk allows tourists to enjoy a few features at the top of the terraces. But to explore the area fully, it required a walk down hundreds of flights of stairs—around 500 feet in elevation change equivalent to a fifty-story building.

I knew such a descent would be grueling and arduous especially because I had not yet become accustomed to the altitude yet, but I still wanted to



explore. Knowing my mother's heart condition, I explained the danger and asked them to remain at the top while I went to explore. I reiterated that if we walked down hundreds of stairs we must climb back up. But she insisted on following. She said she could do it. When we arrived at a little over halfway down the terraces, my mother said that she didn't think she would be able to make it back up. She hadn't fully recognized her limitations! Fortunately, in this area, my parents could continue down to a lower parking lot without having to return to the top. I, on the other hand, would have to climb the stairs—huffing and puffing along the way—retrieve the car, and pick them up at the bottom. Had there been no other alternative, my mother would have had no way to return to the top. Someone would have had to rescue her and carry her out. She couldn't have done it on her own without risk of great injury.

Question  
# 2

In what ways do we sometimes overestimate our intelligence and strength in terms of our ability to deal with circumstances in life?

The salvation offered by God functions very much in this same way. He has clearly explained that we have only one way to overcome sin and attain life. There is no other way out. We cannot escape death. Therefore, He has reminded us of our limitations. We may think that we can do it on our own, but we need His Son. We can never be wise

enough or strong enough to secure salvation on our own. We need Him. One day, many people will find themselves at a point in life where they realize that they can't do it. They find themselves hopelessly stuck with nowhere to turn. But hopefully, they will turn to Christ who can rescue them out of their predicament before it's too late.

Even though we may have a relationship with the Lord, sometimes we forget from where we have come and overestimate our abilities just like the Corinthians did. To our peril, at times, we may overestimate our strength to resist temptation and our ability to keep our eyes focused on the Lord. We desperately need His guidance (1 Cor 10:13). In our service, sometimes we also overestimate our ability to plan and implement a project. We leave God out of the process and rely on our own strength. We may begin a work and ask Him to bless it without ever consulting Him in the first place about how we should proceed. We do it all on our own. Although we may have some limited success according to our own definition, it never amounts to the same success we would have had if we had relied wholly upon the Lord. Therefore, we must learn to trust God and lean upon Him rather than trust in ourselves and venture out on our own (Prov 3:5-6). It never works out well in the end when we try to do it ourselves!

Question  
# 3

Looking back over your life, when have you tried to resolve an issue or do something on your own without help from the Lord? What did you learn?

Because we have a level playing field and we all have access to eternal life through Christ, unexpected results will occur. The cross will cause a great reversal of fortunes. For this reason, Jesus asserts that "the first will be last and the last first. For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt 20:16). Through Christ, God offers salvation free to all (i.e., "many are called"), but few will accept it (i.e., "few are chosen") because they attempt to live independently from the Lord. They try to "find" life and give it meaning through their own means—whether through worldly wisdom, social status, or wealth. As a result, Christ will upend the social order that we have come to expect in this world. The people who seem to have it made in this life will have nothing in the end (i.e., "the first will be last"); unless they follow God's plan in Christ, they will face separation from Him and eternal torment. On the other hand, those upon whom the world looks down (i.e., "the last first") will be enriched by Christ with eternal life when they respond to His call.

Question  
# 4

Why is it so hard for many people to comprehend and accept the gospel, particularly in our own nation today?

In 1 Corinthians, three times in these next two verses Paul describes how **God has chosen** to act contrary to the world's expectations. Please notice that I did not say that God acted contrary to His nature, but rather He acted contrary to the world's misguided expectations. Just as Jesus taught, the cross has turned the customary social order that this world has come to expect upside down. For this reason, Paul describes three prominent reversals that will take place as a result of the cross. First, **God has chosen the foolish things to shame the wise** (v. 27). Second, **God has chosen the weak things to shame the mighty** or strong. Third, **God has chosen the base things and despised things** along with **the things which are not to bring to nothing the things that are** (v. 28). In all three categories, **foolish, weak, and the base things** refer to people who have repented of their sins and trust in God's plan through Christ. At the culmination of history when Christ returns, the **wise, mighty, and things that are** will then discover their error. The **foolish** will be exalted in Christ whereas the **wise** sentenced to death! The **wise, wealthy, and powerful** will lose everything!

The first two reversals in this list seem pretty straight forward. Generally, God has used the seemingly "uneducated" to confound the educated when it comes to the gospel. For example, most of the religious scholars and



highly educated philosophers of Jesus' day rejected His message. So, Jesus intentionally sought those whom the world considered uneducated and untrained—fishermen, a tax collector, and a zealot—to follow Him as His disciples (see Acts 4:13). Even today, those who reject Christ often portray themselves as having superior intellect over Christians. They disparage believers as unenlightened, uninformed, and ignorant. They

often charge believers with lacking critical thinking and reasoning skills. Moreover, they arrogantly try to dispute the validity and veracity (truthfulness) of Scripture citing both science and history as so-called proof; hence, they dismiss the Bible as a fairytale and mock its truth.

Question  
# 5

Even though we may not have formal training, why must we not use our lack of education as an excuse to be “uninformed” or “uninvolved” in ministry when it comes to Scripture?

Similarly, God has used the **weak** to confound **the mighty**. **Weak**, in this sense, refers to those who do not hold positions of authority or influence in society. Oftentimes, those in such influential and powerful positions begin to regard themselves as independent. They estimate that they do not need God because they have already made a name for themselves. They believe that they have achieved everything on their own without the Lord. If they “serve” Him at all, they only give Him platitudes through phony lip service; they live as hypocrites putting more stock in their social status than in a true relationship whereby they seek to serve Christ. Consequently, many non-believers charge Christians with being weak-minded. In their misguided opinion, God is a crutch for **weak** people who need help in coping with life because they cannot make it on their own. In the end, however, the **mighty** will learn that they too will bow at the name of Jesus (Phil 2:9-11).

The last reversal continues the same theme showing how



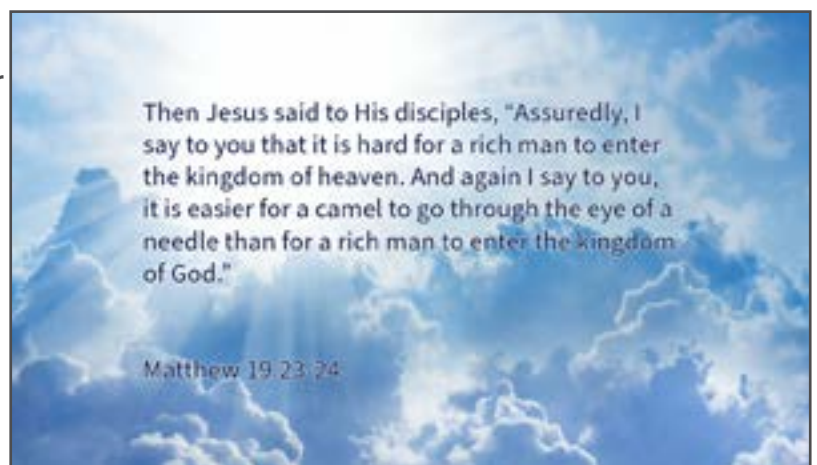
God will humble those who perceive they have status and wealth. This category corresponds to Paul’s revelation in verse 26 that **not many of noble birth are called**. The term translated **base things**, for example, means lowly or insignificant. Taken together with **despised**, it likely refers to those in the lower classes—those who lack status and have little influence. In addition, we can compare the rather cumbersome phrases **the things which are not** and **the things which are** with our more modern English saying “the haves and have nots.” In other words, God has taken “nobodies” in

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the eyes of the world—those who have no wealth, power, prestige, or honor—and He has made them “somebodies” in Christ. Through the grace of the cross, Christ has reversed our fortunes from sinners doomed to death to joint-heirs who will inherit the blessing of eternal life.

Because of the somewhat difficult concepts in this passage, I want to summarize Paul’s argument briefly so that we might better understand. The cross nullifies human status, reputation, works, and achievements. None of these things matters in the eyes of the Lord. Thus, the cross elevates God’s grace. As such, God extends His salvation impartially to anyone who will accept it. Christ didn’t just come to save the wealthy, religious, influential, or royalty of our world. He came to save everyone—including the ones to whom the world pays little attention. Consequently, **God has chosen** the people who seem to amount to nothing in the eyes of the world to **shame** the **wise**, showing them the error of their self-reliance and independence.

Why does Paul place so much emphasis on this great reversal through the cross? He does so for three reasons. First, it is impossible for anyone who rejects God’s plan in favor of his own independence, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance to have eternal life. This doesn’t mean that the educated, rich, and powerful can never be saved. Rather, it means that as long as they trust in themselves for their salvation they can never have eternal life. Like everyone else, these people must humble themselves before the Lord and admit they cannot attain life on their own. They must give up their own pursuits and follow God’s plan (see Matt 19:16-22). We live in an affluent culture that very much features this mindset of independence and has pushed the Lord away. So, we must constantly remind ourselves to depend wholly upon the Lord.



Second, God uses this great reversal among people so that the world could clearly see Him at work. He takes the “nobodies” of the world and does an extraordinary work through them so that He might be glorified. If it is a work we can

do on our own, we would tend to take credit for it ourselves. Consequently, others wouldn't then recognize the hand of God at work; they would perceive that we had done it in our own power and strength. If, on the other hand, it is a work that only God could do, then He alone would be magnified and receive the glory. In this instance, it then becomes unmistakable proof for the mighty work of our sovereign Lord in our lives. Consider the plagues in Egypt as an example. Pharaoh's magicians could replicate the first few plagues. But by the time they arrived at the tenth plague where God took the lives of all the firstborn, the Egyptians recognized His mighty hand at work over life and death.

Question  
# 6

To what work in your life can you point as a supernatural act that only God could have done?

Finally, the great reversal eliminates any and all boasting on our part. As a work only God Himself could do, we had no role whatsoever in our salvation. No matter our background in life, we all must attain salvation in the same way—through a relationship with Christ. Hence, Paul explains that **no flesh** can **glory** or boast **in** God's **presence** (v. 29). God foreknew that we would boast in our own achievements and hold them over the head of others because of our human nature. If we had a hand in our salvation, it would create a spirit of competition and disunity within the church. People would continually seek to outdo the other to gain more honor and a better position of status within the body. Even though we have no room to boast because God has provided everything, people still selfishly engage in such conduct, forgetting the grace of God in their lives. The Corinthians had. They boasted in their spirituality—particularly their wisdom, the “freedom” to sin, and their giftedness. This caused untold damage not only to unity within their fellowship, but also to their witness in the community.

Question  
# 7

In what ways do some people in the church try to boast? How does this disrupt fellowship?

Instead of relying on our own strength, wisdom, and ability, Jesus took care of everything on our behalf. He left nothing unfinished. **For us**, Jesus **became wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption** (v. 30). All three of these concepts refer to the single event of salvation. Paul doesn't list them in any particular

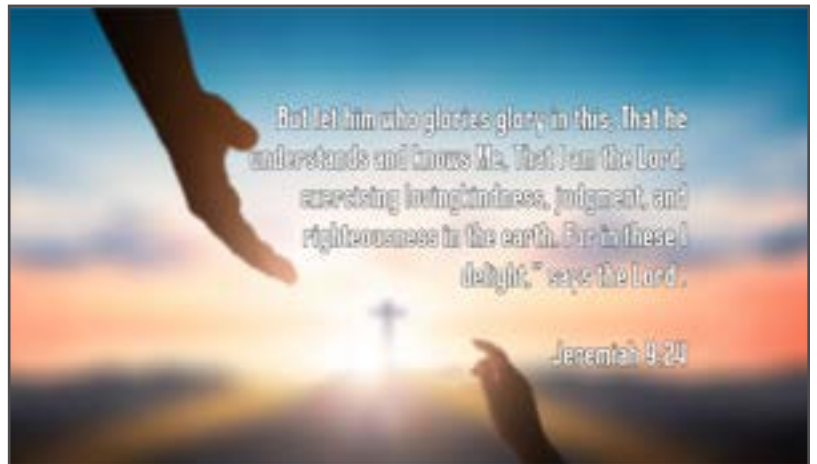


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order other than to say that God has provided salvation in full. He has taken care of every step from beginning to end. By virtue of Jesus' sinlessness, God has declared us righteous or not guilty in a court of law. Christ has removed our sins and imputed us with His righteousness so we can stand boldly before the throne. Thus, Christ through His death in our place has also redeemed us or paid the ransom to free us from the bondage of sin. Finally, He has also sanctified us or set us apart for the purpose of being His holy representative. To be His representative, we must conform our character to His and live in righteousness the way He has shown us.

On our own, we cannot accomplish any of these three things. We don't have the power to save ourselves or transform our lives. Only

God does. By quoting Jeremiah 9:24, Paul supports his conclusion that we have no room for boasting before the Lord (v. 31). When we **glory** or boast, it should always be **in the Lord**. The church is about God, not us. Our preferences don't matter. Our individual accomplishments and achievements don't matter. Unfortunately, many churches today have become human-centered. They cater to people rather than serve the Lord. Churches, in some ways, have become social gatherings where people promote themselves and push to advance their causes. The church in Corinth had become such a body warranting these harsh comments from the Apostle Paul. Quite oppositely, we must become a church unified as one people, recognizing that we owe our lives to the Lord. We must have a unified message, for only the gospel contains the message of salvation. May we God always receive all the honor and glory for what He has done and will do among us.



Question  
# 8

In what ways have some churches become centered on man rather than on the Lord?

**THE FOCUS OF THE MESSAGE**

Paul uses the time he spent ministering among the Corinthians as an example of both the simplicity of the gospel as well as the centrality of the cross. When Paul **came to** Corinth, he **did not come with excellence of speech** (lit., words) or **of wisdom**, but to declare **to** them **the testimony of God** (2:1). In other words, he did not try to impress them with academic and philosophical language or persuade and manipulate them with a deceitful sales pitch, but instead he spoke the truth plainly. He used ordinary, everyday language that captured the central message of the gospel so that everyone could understand. Above all, Paul has not come to them with a mere philosophical message or human wisdom; he has come to them with a divine message from the Lord Himself.

***In-Depth Information***



The word translated **testimony** would normally be translated “mystery.” Here, testimony becomes short-hand for the gospel. The gospel is a “mystery” not in the sense of something secretive, but rather how God takes people of no reputation and redeems them in Christ making them “somebody” with an inheritance beyond compare.

Paul now continues explaining that he **determined not to know anything among** them **except Jesus Christ and Him crucified** (v. 2). When communicating the gospel, Paul didn’t chase rabbits so to speak and convolute its simple message. On the contrary, he remained focused. He kept the main point of the conversation the main point—**Christ crucified** for our sins—for without a perfect Individual paying the penalty on our behalf we would have no salvation! Paul never once became distracted by ancillary issues or lost sight of the most important part of the message. He consistently drove this same point home no matter in what circumstance he may have found himself. This expression, therefore, shows his resolve to preach on the cross of Christ as the means for salvation rather than a bunch of “religious” expectations manufactured by men.



## Instruct

In 2011, I had the opportunity to go on a mission trip to East Africa. Over the years, I had picked up very basic Swahili—at least enough to carry on a fairly substantial conversation. During this particular trip, circumstances arose that I found myself alone at the border of Kenya and Tanzania after dropping off Chacha’s (the missionary) family. Somehow, I needed to fuel the van and drive back into Tanzania to meet him! To shorten an otherwise long story, I was stopped at one of the police checkpoints along the way. Holding an AK-47, the officer approached the van and greeted me. In Swahili, he asked to see my papers. Not having a driver’s license or any other documentation, I gave him my passport. After examining it for a while looking somewhat confused, he handed it back and asked if I had any “tea.” To which in Swahili, I responded, “No.” Then, he asked for “water” to which I replied, “Only this,” while pointing to a half-used bottle. He continued requesting food and making small talk for several minutes. By this time, however, my Swahili had run out. I had nothing left to say. So, I told the officer carrying the AK-47 that it was nice meeting him and that I would be going now.

As I would learn later, something had become lost in translation. Indeed, God certainly had a hand on this entire venture, for it could have ended very badly. After returning safely and reconnecting with Chacha, I recounted what had happened. Although we can laugh about it now, Chacha explained that the officer’s request for “tea” was a euphemism asking for a bribe. I, however, had taken the officer literally. Even though I answered him honestly, I hadn’t truly understood what he was asking because he communicated it in a round-about way! To me, he had concealed his main point. I would have clearly understood had he asked for “money.” Unfortunately, we can do the same with the gospel at times. We can unintentionally obscure its message. The main point can be lost in a litany of words and illustrations. Like Paul, we need to make every effort to keep the message clear, concise, and simple: **Christ crucified** and nothing else.

Question  
# 9

What issues can distract us in presenting the gospel today in our world? In other words, what “things” can hinder or obscure the message of the gospel?

Paul also acknowledges that he came **in weakness** with **much fear and trembling** (v. 3). Moreover, his message (lit., word) and **preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of**

## Instruct

**power** (v. 4). In what sense did Paul come in **weakness**? He did not come in his own ability and strength. He didn't point to his academic degrees, pedigree, or heritage as qualification for his authority and teaching. The Corinthians could clearly see God working in his life. Consequently, Paul didn't seek to draw attention to himself by presenting himself as an expert or scholar—a technique of other contemporary teachers and philosophers of his day in order to amass followers or students for their own prowess. On the contrary, he humbly pointed people to Christ through the gospel through the divine help of the Holy **Spirit**. In other words, Paul was effective in his ministry not because he had some human advantage, but precisely because he had surrendered fully to the Lord who in turn worked through Him mightily. Paul didn't want people to see him and revel in his giftedness; he wanted people to see Christ and hear the message of the gospel plainly.

What does this mean for us as believers today? We must keep the gospel simple. Certainly, we should contextualize or explain it in way to help people understand, but we should



never distort, change, or obscure its meaning. In addition, we must remember that people respond to the gospel because of conviction from the Lord; He draws them through the **Spirit**—not through the **persuasive** power of our words. We can give the most persuasive speech and people will still not respond to the gospel. We must rely upon the Lord for the results—not our own ability and power to persuade. In fact, God has not given us the job of either convincing or convicting people; He has given us the task of speaking His truth clearly in love to all. Therefore, Paul concludes with the reminder that **our faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God** (v. 5).

We must be united in communicating the divine message of the gospel from God to the world: Christ crucified and resurrected. Let's not make the gospel more complicated than God intended it! May we not use human gimmicks or worldly techniques in an attempt to persuade the world, but let us communicate the gospel in

love plainly and clearly so that even a child could understand. May we always leave the convincing and conviction to the Lord so that others can see His **power** displayed in salvation. Any one of us can share the gospel with those whom God places in our path. We do not have to be a great public speaker, a brilliant scholar, or a champion debater. We do not have to have a seminary degree or be called to preach vocationally. We just have to be willing and ready to share when God grants us that opportunity. After all, we don't rely on our ability to persuade or convince people to respond to the gospel. We rely on the **power of God** working in the lives of individuals, for only He alone can save through Christ.

Question  
# 10

What is the difference between trying to “convince” someone to respond to the gospel and to simply speak the truth? What is the danger of going into a conversation with the attitude that we will convince or persuade them to respond?

## *Inspire*

In our culture, we are often overwhelmed with information. With ever-decreasing attention spans, we can easily tune-out lengthy messages and miss the main point. We tend to skim e-mails, glance at texts, and even watch YouTube videos instead of reading lengthy, detailed instructions. In some cases, sometimes we miss a key word or important idea because we get in a hurry to get through the information. So, the project ends in disaster. God foreknew that we didn't have long attention spans. Consequently, He gave us a short, simple message right to the point about eternal life. Christ died for us. We can have eternal life if we would confess and turn from our sins through His Son. Let's be united in this message. Let us not overcomplicate it or introduce unnecessary distractions, but let us boldly proclaim it knowing that God gives the results. All we must do is be faithful in communicating the message exactly as He has given it to us.

## ***Incorporate:***

In what ways do some believers and churches obscure the message of the gospel in trying to reach the culture? What is the danger in trying to “modernize” or make the gospel “relevant” to our culture? How does this miss the main point?

When sharing the gospel, why is it important not to allow the recipient / hearer to become distracted by impertinent information or questions? What are some distractions (questions) that people may bring up when hearing the gospel? How should you respond to them?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***



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