

1st Corinthians Introduction and Chapter 1- John Karmelich

1. After finishing the most practical book in the Old Testament (Proverbs), we are now moving on to what many people consider the most practical of the books in the New Testament.
 - a) Of all the books in the New Testament and of all of Paul's letters, the two letters to the Corinthians are considered the most practical. What I mean by that is they are not heavy with doctrinal philosophy but deal with problems and issues and how to solve them.
 - b) As opposed to say, Romans, which is very theoretical, the two epistles to the Corinthians deal with fixing problems. While there are some doctrinal statements, it is not a big lecture on what is Christianity. Most of the letter deals with problems the church was having and how to deal with those problems.
2. This leads me to my theme for this lesson: "Bad living stems from bad beliefs". (Taken from John MacArthur's Study Bible). What I mean by that is if one is not practicing the right things, it leads to bad Christian views. The problem with the Corinthian church had nothing to do with the "tools" they had. They had all the right ingredients to practice Christianity. The problem is they were influenced by the local culture as much as God. They were a "mixed bag" of doing what God wanted them to do and at the same time doing what the "world" around them was doing.
 - a) The lessons to us in this letter to the Corinthians is about learning to live a life pleasing to God in all that we do and not living like the unsaved world around us.
 - b) The church of Corinth is still made up of saved people. Paul never says the Christians of this town are unsaved. He implies through this letter that their practical living for God is wrong and is in need of correction.
 - c) The application of course is to look at how the Christians of Corinth lived and see if we can learn a few things to apply to our lives. May God help us to see this letter as things that apply to our lives and things we can "correct" and not just a historical letter. May we learn to live a life pleasing to God in all that we do. Amen. (OK, that's a good summary for the week. For those of you who never read past page 1, that's a wrap. ☺)
3. I always like to give the "background" when I start a new book. That is the who, what, where's and why's of Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians.
 - a) Corinth was a major port city in Greece. The city still exists today. When the Greeks fought the Romans in the early days of the Roman Empire, Corinth fought against Rome. The city of Corinth was destroyed by the Romans. Due to its strategic location, the city was also rebuilt by one of the early Roman emperors. The reason it is so important is that sailing around the Greek peninsula was difficult. It was easier to dock in Corinth and then literally drag the ship across a four-mile "land bridge" to the other side. In fact, in the 19th Century a water-bridge was finally built at Corinth as opposed to dragging the ships across the land.
 - i) This land bridge made Corinth a popular city for traveling merchants. Corinth developed a reputation at that time as an "anything goes" type of location. The Greek plays of that era depicted a person of Corinth as a staggering drunk.
 - ii) If one can visualize the "anything goes" aspect of say, Los Angeles, Las Vegas or New York, then one can understand Corinth's reputation of that day.
 - iii) In a city with an "anything goes" reputation, also came lots of preaching philosophers. The Greek's were known for philosophers and a lot of them came to Corinth. The general idea was anything and everything was accepted here.
 - iv) If all of that wasn't enough, Corinth also had a large temple for "Aphrodite", the Greek goddess of love. There were a thousand temple priestess, who would go out into the city in the evening to draw men into the temple to honor Aphrodite with their lovemaking.

- b) I give all of this background as the Christian church in Corinth existed in this town.
 - i) It's hard enough being a Christian in a normal setting. To be a Christian in a city known for its wickedness and an "anything goes" reputation is tougher.
 - ii) An underlying question for the church in Corinth is "is the church influencing the culture, or is the culture influencing the church?" God wants us, collectively to be an influence, a "light" the world around us. We are failing when the church is being more influenced by the culture than the church doing the influencing.
 - iii) Most likely, most of the Christians in Corinth came from this "background".
- 4. Meanwhile, let's talk about the church in Corinth itself.
 - a) Paul founded this church. The book of Acts describes the fact Paul spent about 18 months there. This letter was written from Ephesians, which is also in Greece. As best scholars can tell, this letter was written around 55AD. It was written after that 18-month period.
 - b) There is a joke among bible scholars that this is actually Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. That is because there is a reference to a previous letter sent by Paul (1st Corinthians 5:9). One has to remember that not everything written by Paul was designed to be scripture. I'm sure Paul had other letters and other writings that were not necessarily God inspired and did not become part of the Scripture cannon.
 - c) One thing we'll discover in this letter is that the church in Corinth was "rich" as far as spiritual gifts were concerned.
 - i) The church in Corinth had lots of problems, which is the main topic of this letter. On the positive side, the Christians who were in Corinth were rich in spiritual gifts including speaking in tongues. One of the key issues discussed in this letter is their use and abuse of spiritual gifts.
 - ii) One of the underlying points of this letter is just because a church has great spiritual gifts, does not necessary make it an effective church. If the church is failing to be an influence on the community, it is just another "side show" in a city known for all of its side shows. The problem with this church is that it had charisma, but it lacked "character". We'll get into that in this book.
 - d) Again, remember my lesson title, "Bad living comes from bad beliefs".
- 5. Chapter 1, Verse 1: Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,
 - a) When we write letters today, we sign them at the end. In letters of that time, the author was given first, then who the letter was to, then the text of the letter.
 - b) The author is Paul. Most scholars accept the author as Paul without much question.
 - c) The issue of Verse 1 is Paul's "apostleship". One of the problems that comes up later in this chapter is that some Christians in Corinth follow Paul, and some follow other apostles and teachers. Because Paul was not part of the original "12", some were questioning whether we should accept Paul's word as an apostle.
 - i) The proof for us of Paul's apostleship is in Acts Chapter 9 where Paul gets a vision given by Jesus himself. Jesus explains how Paul will be used in a mighty way (Acts 9:15). While we don't have a quote of Jesus calling Paul an apostle, that term simply means one is sent by God for some specific purpose.
 - d) The letter is also co-written by "Sosthenes". This is most likely the former ruler of the local Jewish Synagogue in Corinth. What is implied is Sosthenes became a Christian after being rejected by the Jews for failing to stop Paul's preaching (Acts 18:17). The title implies that Sosthenes took dictation from Paul and agreed to the content of this letter.
- 6. Verse 2: To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours:
 - a) Verse 1 told us who the letter is "from", Verse 2 tells us who the letter is "to".
 - i) Notice it is not "just" to the church in Corinth, but the church of God in Corinth.

- ii) This is Paul's subtle reminder that all believers in Jesus are of "one church". We're going to discuss this more in a few verses as one of the first issues Paul brings up is divisional problems in this church.
 - b) What is to be noticed by this greeting is that the Christians in Corinth are still saved and are still Christians despite all the problems they have as described through this letter.
 - c) Notice this letter is written not just to the Corinthians. Paul says in effect that this letter is for "all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ".
 - i) The subtly of this introduction is Paul is working to end the divisional factions that exist in Corinth and at the same time remind them that even though they have problems, as long as they are trusting in Jesus for their salvation, they are saved.
7. Verse 3: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- a) This is Paul's standard opening greeting. The word "grace" means unmerited blessing. It means there is nothing we can do to add to God's blessing. If we believe we have to work to earn our salvation in any way, shape or form, it is not grace.
 - i) Christians should modify their behavior and live in a way to please God in all that we do. Christians have the freedom to live however we want, but the choice we should make is to live a life pleasing to God. The Christian life is all about God working on us to change our behavior in a way that is pleasing to Him!
 - b) The second key term is "peace". This is a Jewish greeting based on the Hebrew word "shalom". The idea of peace is an all encompassing peace in that one has comfort in every aspect of their lives that God is in charge and watching over us.
 - c) This "grace and peace" is from God the Father and God the Son. The idea is because we love both, that grace and peace are bestowed on us.
8. Verse 4: I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.
- a) If you study the opening verses of all of Paul's letters, you get the idea that Paul spent a lot of time praying for the churches. Here Paul states his prayer request for Corinth.
 - b) Remember that the church in Corinth is known as one with a lot of problems. Despite that, Paul thanks God because of His grace has been given to the church in Corinth.
 - i) What that is saying is if these people are "in Christ", then God is able to work out the problems of this church and help it grow for the better.
 - c) Just because Paul believed the Corinthian church is in God's grace, does not mean Paul should just wait for God fix the church. One thing to understand is that God works through people. Yes, the Corinth church is in God's grace. At the same time, they need leadership to guide them. Since Paul started that church and is an apostle, he is qualified to take on that role. Notice Paul didn't just care about winning new converts. He also cared about seeing those who were saved grow in their relationship with God.
9. Verse 5: For in him you have been enriched in every way--in all your speaking and in all your knowledge-- ⁶ because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.
- a) One of the things to be gathered about the Corinthian church is that they didn't lack any spiritual gift. A key lesson of this church is that a church can be rich in spiritual gifts, but if they are not using them properly or if that church is lacking discipline to live a life pleasing to God, in a sense those gifts are wasted.
 - b) To put it another way, this church has all the "tools" to do the right thing, but they are not properly applying those tools. I'm sure that in this church, there were those who had the gifts of teaching, comforting others, leading, healing and even tongues. The point is not that the church in Corinth needed more spiritual gifts, but they needed more instruction on how to properly apply the gifts they have.
 - i) May God help us to apply the tools He has given us to live a life pleasing to Him in all that we do. ☺

- c) Paul says in Verse 5 this church has been "enriched in every way... (Verse 6) because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you". Paul's point is that this church did not earn any of these spiritual gifts, but these gifts were simply given to them by God as a sign that these people are saved and do belong to Christ.
 - d) Verse 7 says this church "does not lack any spiritual gift as they (we) wait for Lord Jesus to be revealed." The first century church was waiting for the second coming of Jesus. The church today is still waiting. I believe God designed it that way. It should be the hope of every Christian that today is the day that Jesus returns. It is God the Father's way to keep us on the "straight and narrow" knowing the day of judgment can be any day.
 - e) So if this church has all of these spiritual gifts, how should those gifts be used, and what were they doing wrong in the first place? All born-again Christians are given some spiritual gifts. This is an ability one has more than the person next to you. For some it may be the ability to teach or lead. For others, it is a desire to help others in their time of need. Some have a special gift of prayer. Some have gifts of healing. Others at this time had the gift of speaking in tongues. We'll spend a few chapters discussing that one.
 - i) The point is all of these gifts are to be used to glorify God, strengthen the church and make all of us better Christians. The "great mistake" is when we use these special gifts to glorify ourselves. When we start saying "Look what God is doing through me" is when we are not glorifying Him with these gifts."
 - ii) It should also be stated that God also gives special gifts to nonbelievers as well. Sometimes God gives us special talents to see how we use them in life.
10. Verse 8: He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.
- a) Paul ends this section with a reminder that God is faithful to deal with these issues. Remember that these Christians in Corinth were still Christians despite their faults. Paul's point is that they can't lose their salvation despite the problems they have as long as they keep on believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.
 - b) The "balance" one has to see in reading the first 9 verses is that Paul understands that the Corinthians are part of God's church and therefore God can and will work to change them for the better. One cannot be "unsaved" once one is saved. Paul has faith that if this church believes in Jesus, God will work through them to make them the type of church God wants them to be. At the same time, God works through people. God called on Paul to explain the issues that the church in Corinth needed to work on.
 - i) Does that mean God calls on you and me to fix our local church? The structure of a Christian church, as laid out in the bible is about elders being in charge. I'm a big believer that a church should not go forward with any plan unless all the leaders are on agreement of that plan. If one has a serious problem with the church, it should be brought to the church elders for them to deal with.
11. Verse 10: I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹² What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."
- a) Beginning in Verse 10, Paul brings up the first problem the church has: Divisions. The problem with the church in Corinth is that some members follow Paul, some follow Apollos and some Cephas (which Simon Peter's birth name in Greek). Others in that church say they only follow what Jesus himself taught.
 - i) Since most Christians know who Paul and Peter are, a quick word on "Apollos". If you read through the book of Acts, this man is mentioned a couple of times. Apparently he is a great speaker.

- ii) Apollos originally went around teaching about John's baptism as he didn't know the full gospel story. Once he was corrected, he then taught about Jesus death and resurrection. He worked with Paul and also traveled to Corinth to that church. (Reference Acts 18:24-19:3).
 - b) The point of this verse is not to condemn different types of Christian churches. God calls many people to preach. Some learn better from one style, others from another. This verse is not condemning having different types of preachers and teachers. The condemnation of this verse is about saying the only way to God is through Paul's teaching or the only way is through Apollos or Peter.
 - i) First of all, these guys are all preaching the same Gospel message. I'm sure each of them had a different style and emphasized different aspects. The key point of salvation through grace alone, and the belief in God the Father and the death and resurrection of Jesus was taught by all of these guys.
 - ii) This church was divided into factions by saying in effect the only correct way is through Paul, while others were saying the only correct way is to listen to Apollos and others were saying through Peter or Jesus words only.
 - iii) Christian unity does not mean that group is correct in its doctrinal view, just that they should be unified in their understanding the Christian key facts (Jesus as God, Jesus dieing for our sins, etc.). I'm sure every church in Corinth thought the problem was their views on Christianity were correct and every other church was wrong. The mistake is to think that "our group" is the only correct way of looking at things. The key is the message of the cross. The key is the fundamental message of the Gospel, which is that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for our sins and was raised again and is now in charge.
 - c) Paul's desire is that the Christians in Corinth be "perfectly united in mind and thought".
 - i) It does not mean he wants every Christian to go to the same church. It does mean we are to respect other Christians who we disagree with on non-essential debate issues. It means we are to have unity on the essential issues and if we debate on other issues, we debate respectfully, knowing that the person on the other side of the debate is saved as much as we are.
12. Verse 13: Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. ¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.
- a) Paul is continuing his discussion of "division" within the church in Corinth. Apparently one of the issues causing division is "who baptized who". Some in that church thought they were better than others based on who baptized them.
 - b) These verses help to show that this letter was dictated. Paul was recalling of the top of his head who he personally baptized. In Verse 16, Paul realized he forgot to mention the household of Stephanas and added that to this short list of who Paul personally baptized.
 - c) Verse 17 makes the key point here: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel". The underlying point is that it is not important who baptizes you. The question is do we understand what that baptism represents in our lives?
 - i) I don't believe Paul was against the concept of baptizing people. He baptizes a few people himself. Paul was against the concept of saying that any individual Christian is more special than another based on who baptized who.
 - ii) Christians have debated for centuries over when and how one should be baptized. Some churches argue for baby baptisms and others for baptisms when the person is old enough to understand the commitment of baptism.

- iii) My view is that baby baptisms are for the parents since the babies have no idea what is happening. It is similar to how Protestant parents do "baby dedications".
- iv) Do I believe it is a requirement for Christians to be baptized? No. Should all Christians be baptized? Yes. If a person on their deathbed sincerely accepts Jesus as their Savior and understands the Gospel message, I believe they are saved whether they are baptized or not. With that exception stated, I fully believe that a Christian should get baptized as a sign to those around them of their commitment to being a follower of Jesus.
 - a) The Roman Catholic Church and some other denominations have the idea of "confirmation", where an older child confirms their faith in Jesus.
 - b) Most Protestant churches only baptize adults and older children who understand what is at stake.
 - c) I don't think the actual methodology is as key as one's personal understand of what is at stake and what one is committing to in life.
 - d) One is not saved by being baptized. One is making a public commitment to serve Jesus Christ. The key is not the commitment or the style of that commitment as much as the follow up on that commitment.
- d) Let's look at Verse 17 again, before wrapping this up: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."
 - i) Paul's point is not that he is against baptism, but it is not what God primarily called him to do. Paul believed his primary role is to preach the gospel. What I wanted to point out was the next phrase: "not with words of human wisdom".
 - ii) A mistake Christians make is that we need to preach "just the right message" in order for people to get saved. We think that we need to say just say the right words, people will repent. The point is God works through the power of the message of the cross, not through one's ability to be a great public speaker.
 - iii) When one shares the message of the cross with people, the key is just to explain it to the best of one's ability and then trust in God's ability to save a person and not the specific power of one's speaking ability.
 - iv) I don't believe Paul was a great public speaker. Paul trusted in God's ability to work through him and that's it. Paul simply preached the message of the cross and let God worry about the results.
- 13. Verse 18: 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.
 - a) That concept of "preaching of the cross" through God's ability continues in these verses.
 - b) It's interesting to think about the concept of "We worship a God that has been crucified." That would be like saying today, "I worship a God who was sent to the electric chair or was hung to die."
 - c) That is why Paul says the message is "foolishness" to those who are perishing. To those who refuse to listen or refuse to believe it, the concept of a god that has died for our sins does sound silly. One of the reasons the bible is written by many different writers over many centuries is to lay proof to the claims of the gospel.
 - d) The Jewish people did believe in the concept of a Messiah. They wanted a Messiah who would overthrow Rome and set up the Messianic kingdom. The idea of God dying for their sins was unthinkable. The whole purpose of animal sacrifices and confession of sin dealt with that issue. What they failed to grasp is they had to do those rituals over and over again, as opposed to the concept of those rituals pointing to God Himself eventually paying the price for our sins.
 - e) Verse 18 says is the Gospel message it is the power of salvation to those of us who are being saved. In the bible, the concept of "being saved" is past, present and future tense.

- i) It is past tense in that when we first gave our lives to Christ, we were saved and we cannot lose that salvation based on how much we sin as long as we continue to trust in Christ for our salvation.
 - ii) It is future tense in that when we die in this lifetime, we immediately enter heaven and are changed into a being that no longer sins. We are now in God's presence.
 - iii) It is present tense in that God is working in our lives now, to help us grow and change to be more "Christ-like" every day. When we are baptized, God does not leave us alone at that point. To be "born again" is the start of a new life. In the same sense that Paul told the Corinthians in the opening of this letter that He is confident God is continuing to work on them to change them into the image of His son. In the same way, continues to work on us to conform us in Christ's image.
 - a) What does that mean practically? It means many things we did before we were saved we should no longer feel comfortable doing. God works on our level, one day at time, to get us to do things and not do things that make us more pleasing to Him in all that we do.
 - b) Paul is emphasizing "being saved" in this letter as the church in Corinth had problems, but they were still saved. Paul wanted to show them areas of their lives and our lives that we can work on to make us more pleasing to God in all that we do.
- 14. Verse 19: For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."
 - a) The underlying point of this verse is that the wisdom of God far surpasses anything man can come up. Mankind comes up with all sorts of reasons why the gospel story cannot be true and billions of people who know the story, refuse to believe it.
 - i) Well, just because they refuse to believe it, does not make it false. The underlying point of this verse is that all people will face God's judgment.
 - ii) God "frustrates" man's own ideas of eternity? How, by showing the flaws in the logic and showing how the Gospel message is true.
 - b) Is it fair that people will go to hell simply for refusing to believe the gospel message?
 - i) A better way of looking at it is people will spend eternity based on what they deserve. People who refuse Jesus payment for their sins are trying to approach God based on their own goodness. God in a sense tells them, "Great, let's review your life based on My standards of right and wrong (the law) and see how you did." Let's say that person is not that familiar with the Old Testament. God may judge them based on what they did know. Even if we say we never murdered or never stole, Jesus says God's standards are based on our thoughts as well as our actions. If we considered doing such an action, it is a sin. It may be less of a sin than carrying out that action, but it is still wrong from God's perspective.
 - c) What about those people who never heard the Gospel message in the first place?
 - i) My view is God will judge people fairly based on what they did know. The same principal applies to children who die young. I believe there will be lots of people in heaven who say, die young or lived a good life based on what limited knowledge they do have of God. Remember this is a minority. The majority of people in hell will be those who had the opportunity to "know better" and refused.
- 15. Verse 20: Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
 - a) What Paul is doing is comparing the "foolish" of the concept of believing in the story of the cross versus all the "wisdom" man has come up with to explain God and His purpose for mankind. Paul is stating all of this is before he can correct the error's of the church in Corinth, first Paul must establish what is "right". The church in Corinth has to compete with all sorts of religions and philosophers that existed in that town.

- b) Therefore it is necessary to understand exactly what do Christians believe. In order to discuss the "false concepts" about Christianity, first one has to understand what is "true". The "truth" is that God Himself had to pay the price for our sins. It is the only way to show perfect forgiveness and perfect justice at the same time. The justice is to understand we are guilty of sin. The forgiveness is for God Himself to pay the price. That is the message of the cross. We are guilty and we deserve the worse punishment imaginable. The forgiveness is that Jesus died for our sins and all we have to do is accept that fact in order to have eternal life.
 - c) There is no other religion or philosophy that teaches that God died for us and for our sins. At the same time false views about Jesus were already starting to creep in saying things like Jesus wasn't really human and therefore he didn't really die on the cross. The point of this verse is that all the "smart things" that man can come up with will one day look foolish as compared to the truth of God.
 - i) What is interesting to consider is the multi-god philosophy that was so dominant in Greek and Roman society eventually gave way to the worship of the true God. Christianity began as an obscure cult out of an obscure religion. For the most part, Christianity was rejected by the nation of Israel. Yet in a matter of centuries, it became so dominant, it eventually replaced the multi-god religion that dominated that section of the world.
 - ii) I bring this up because Paul's prediction in this verse came true. The "wise men" of that day and all of their philosophies eventually came to nothing. The various gods worshipped by the Greeks eventually just became "fairly tales" in comparison to the truth of the gospel message.
 - d) How does this apply today? There are many people claiming that Christianity is a false religion. Today we have many false variations of Christianity as well. There are cults that refuse to accept the idea of Jesus being God himself, coming down in the form of man to die for our sins. Many cannot accept the concept of Jesus being 100% man and 100% God at the same time.
 - i) Even besides the other major religions, there are people who worship at the "god of financial success" or the "god of fame", even though they refuse to use those terms. My point is that in the same way Christianity faced its detractors in the first century, so Christianity faces its detractors today.
 - ii) The church in Corinth is no different that what exists today, in that there are lots of alternatives to simply accepting the Gospel message for what it truly is and means. At the same time Christians have to understand what is and is not pleasing to God and that is a key point of this letter.
15. Verse 21: For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.
- a) Was Christianity originally spread through the leading citizens and "smart people" of that day? No. It was an underground and unaccepted cult that grew one person at a time by one ordinary person sharing the gospel message with another. The point is God chose average people to spread the Gospel message as opposed to the "wise" of that day.
 - b) God still chooses average people like you and me to spread the gospel message as opposed to the "wisdom" of men. These "average people" spreading the gospel then and now are saving many others by them believing the gospel message.
 - c) The success of the gospel cannot be given to man and his great ability to speak. Any and every person that accepts the Gospel message of the cross does so only by the grace of God working in their lives. That's sort of the key point of this verse: God Himself is working to save souls by working through the lives of everyday people. That is how the "foolishness" of God is greater than the "wisdom" of mankind.

16. Verse 22: Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
- a) Paul dealt with two main cultures of that world: The Jewish culture and the Greek culture. Even though much of that world was under Roman dominance, the culture was mainly affected by centuries of Greek rule and the Jewish culture that is the background of Christianity.
 - b) Verse 22 says that "Jews demand miraculous signs". If you read through the Gospels you can see that is true. The religious leaders were constantly asking Jesus to perform some sort of "sign" that He is the Messiah. Jesus could just finish some miracle and still Jewish people would look at Him and demand another miraculous sign to prove His claim.
 - i) The problem with "miracles" is that they are never enough. All of the people Jesus healed of diseases and demon-possession eventually died again. While miracles can lead one down the right path, I am convinced that by themselves, miracles are not enough to truly change one person's heart.
 - ii) The multitudes of Jewish people rejected Jesus once they realized He did not come to overthrow Rome and set up the millennial kingdom then and there. There are many people today (both Jews and non-Jews) willing to accept a ruling messiah, but not one that will die for their sins!
 - iii) When you read through the book of Acts, there were miracles performed, but the main way people got converted was by the verbal spreading of the gospel message. My point here is that miracles can be used to validate God's messenger's (you and me) as being from God, but it is sharing of the Gospel message that is God's tool to spread the gospel message to others. Two thousand years later that has not changed. The main way people get saved is by one person sharing the message of the Gospel with another.
 - iv) Which leads back to the first point of this verse: The Jews demanded a sign, but signs are not enough to lead people to Jesus. Those demands of a sign became a stumbling block to those of the Jewish culture.
 - c) The second illustration of Verse 22 is that "Greeks look for wisdom".
 - i) The Greeks loved various forms of philosophy. The Greeks were famous for having "wise men" that argued different philosophies about life and death.
 - ii) I'm sure many Greeks listened to the gospel message out of a sense of curiosity. It was something new and different. I'm sure some would even accept Christ as just another god among the hundreds. The stumbling block for the Greek's was to accept Jesus as the only God and to reject the rest of the gods of that time.
 - d) Which leads to Verse 23: "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles".
 - i) Here was Paul and his companions preaching Jesus as the only God, dying for one's sins and the necessity of believing that message in order to be saved. Such a message was a stumbling block for the Jews as they refuse to believe it was necessary for Jesus to die for their sins. It was foolishness to the Greek culture of that day as it did not fit into the "wisdom" of their culture.
 - e) Which leads to Verse 24: "but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."
 - i) Remember Paul's point is the "foolishness of God" is greater than all the "wisdom" of man. Think about the "absurdity" of the entire bible story. It is to accept the idea that human life began with two people who started sinning when they ate forbidden fruit. There is the "absurdity" of the story of Noah. There is the "absurdity" of God picking one small nation to be His witnesses to the world and the responsibility of bringing the Messiah into the world.

- ii) The point is despite how "silly" all of bible sounds to an outsider, God changes the hearts of believers to get us to accept the bible as the Gospel truth.
 - iii) If there is an underlying point to all of this, it is the importance to pray for the unsaved. One cannot convince a person of the truth of God's love and God's game plan simply by being a great communicator. God uses people like you and me to spread the Gospel message. It is not through "our power" that people get saved, but by God working through us. It is God who gets all the credit.
 - iv) Jesus is called "The power of God and the wisdom of God" in this verse. The idea of the "power of God" is that it is the power of God working that leads people to be saved. The idea of "wisdom of God" is that God chooses to work through everyday people to lead others down the correct path of salvation.
 - f) Remember why Paul is stating this. The goal is to get the Corinth church and Christians today to get their "doctrines right" about God in order to live a life pleasing to God.
17. Verse 25: For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.
- a) This verse is not saying God is foolish or weak. The point is God's game plan for salvation, is to use average people to lead other "average people" to salvation is far greater than the greatest men of the world and their false messages. God's method of salvation, by having Jesus die for our sins, and then having that message spread one person at a time around the world is not something "the world" can come up with.
 - b) The point is God's game plan of spreading the gospel message seems foolish to the world, but time has shown that God's "foolishness" is far greater than man's "wisdom".
 - c) If man's "wisdom" is so great, why did the multi-god system of that day eventually die out? Did someone force these false gods to die? The point is many people eventually saw the foolishness of that system and abandoned it for the truth of the Gospel message. Don't get me wrong, false religions and cults still exist today. Many of the false-preaching is around today was around in Paul's time, only under different names. Part of spreading the gospel message is to deal with the "false systems" that are all around us.
 - d) The point is the "foolishness of God" will prevail over any and all systems created by man. God calls on us to be part of His "plan" for mankind. God did not call on us to get saved and then sit there and do nothing about it. God calls on Christians collectively and individually to continue to spread the Gospel message to others.
18. Verse 26: Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.
- a) The vast majority of Christians were not considered "wise" by human standards when we accepted Jesus in our hearts and gave our lives to him. Before most of us were saved, we were part of the "world's system" in one form or another. We saw the foolishness of the world and were willing to walk away from it in order to follow Jesus.
 - b) There is a famous story of a woman of English nobility who said she was saved by the letter "n" in the word "not" in this verse. The verse says "not many were influential". The verse does not say that "no one" of high rank could be saved. It says that "not many" of nobility would turn to God. This woman was saved by the letter "n" in that it was possible for a person of nobility to be saved.
 - c) Let's talk about the "wisdom" of the world versus God. The "world" does not consider it wise of the time and money we give to God. They consider it a waste of resources to say, give money to spread the gospel message and a waste of time to pray for missionaries.
 - i) To me, the greatest mistake people make who live in Christian societies, is they claim they believe in Jesus, but never do anything about it. There is no change in their lifestyle based on that belief. There is no visual commitment to serve Jesus. Yes we are saved by faith alone, but if one is saved, others should see evidence of that salvation in our behavior. We should live for Him, not for ourselves.

19. Verse 27: But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.
- a) If you think about it, God could have chosen a lot of different ways to bring Jesus into this world. He could have died on the cross right after the Garden of Eden incident. One of the reasons God waited so long is that He wanted to create as much evidence as possible to validate Jesus plan by having different writers tell of different aspects of Jesus' ministry all before it ever happened. I will argue that every aspect of Jesus first and second coming is written "somewhere in code" in the Old Testament.
 - i) Instead of having a great king or emperor introduce Jesus at the peak of His power, God choose the method of having Jesus born to a poor couple in Israel.
 - b) The point is God choose this "foolish" method of bringing His son into the world and that method puts to shame all the "wisdom" of the wise people of this world.
 - i) The great Greek philosophers could not comprehend how God could be perfect in the judgment of sin and perfect in forgives at the same time. The Greek philosopher Socrates understood this when he said "I believe God can redeem man, but I don't understand how." The Greek philosophers understood the problem, but not the solution.
 - c) When the verse says "God choose the week things to confound the strong", it means that God's methods of bringing the Messiah into the world is "confounding" to the wisdom of that era and the wisdom of the world to this day.
 - d) Remember the "topic at hand" is salvation. The church in Corinth was divided into factions about how to be saved and who to follow. This gets back to my theme that "bad living come from bad beliefs about Christianity".
20. Verse 28: He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.
- a) The "lowly" things God choose are you and I. The point is God choose millions and billions of "average" people to spend eternity with Him. The point is we can't boast before God based on our goodness, but only what God has done through us.
 - b) The "despised" things would be those who have led immoral lifestyles or committed horrible crimes and then truly turned their lives over to Christ. Such people may still have to pay society back for what they have done, but at the same time they are truly forgiven by God and He has worked through people's lives for His glory.
 - c) All of us "Christians" are to work to "nullify the things that are". This world belongs to Satan and will do so until Jesus returns. If you recall when Jesus was tempted by Satan, one of the temptations was Satan saying, "I will give you these worlds if you bow down and worship me". That statement could not be a real temptation unless it was true. (Source Matthew 4:9 and Luke 4:7).
 - i) What does that mean practically? It means when we see people arguing for lifestyles other than what God teaches, God gives us the power not only to overcome that lifestyle, but to lead others down the correct path.
 - ii) Whatever effort we make to change things for the better, be it in our lives or in the lives of others, the point here is we have no right to brag about those changes, as it is not us, but God working through us.
 - iii) The point of Verse 29 is no one can "brag" before God in heaven of all the things done. It is not "us", but God working through us.
 - iv) When we get to heaven, we will not be us bragging before God of all the things we have done for Him. It will be us thanking God for using us and working through us. The point is all the glory goes to God and not us.

21. Verse 30: It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."
- a) The "him" of Verse 30 is God the Father. The point is it is only because of God that we are Christians in the first place. It is only because of God the Father that we have a righteous standing (as if we have never sinned) and can live for eternity.
 - b) The idea of "holiness" is that we have been called to be separated from the world to be used by God. The concept of holiness is to be singled out for some special purpose. All believers in Jesus have been called to live holy lives. We don't do this because we have to as we are not under the law. We do this because we want to and want to please God.
 - c) The third key word is "redemption". The idea is that we have been "purchased" by God and now belong to Him. Whether we realized it or not, before we were saved we were slaves to sin and never thought about denying ourselves of its pleasure. It is only because God has redeemed us that we are free from the power of sin. It does not mean we will be sinless the rest of our lives, but God gives us the power to turn from sin and live a life pleasing to Him in all that we do.
 - d) The final verse is saying that if we "boast" we are to boast in what God is doing, not what we are doing. The last 10 verses of this chapter (more or less) have been a mini-sermon by Paul on the concept that we are redeemed based on what God has done through us and not by any effort of our own. At the same time, God choose the "foolish" things of the world (that's you and me) to work through to carry out His plans for mankind.
22. Let me wrap up this lesson and get back to my theme: "Bad living comes from bad believes".
- a) The Christian church in Corinth was having all sorts of problems and it stemmed from bad beliefs. Paul's underlying point of the entire letter is to correct their views about Christianity and hopefully, that will correct some of their problems.
 - b) Paul spent a good part of Chapter 1 going over the essentials of the Gospel and emphasized the fact the Corinthian church is saved. For Paul, that will be the foundation to correct many of the problems this church facings.
 - c) The fault of the church in Corinth is they were "mixing" the knowledge of God with the wisdom of the world. They weren't letting go of some of the "world's way" (non-Christian) ways of dealing with issues. We get hints of that in Chapter 1 when Paul mentions the church is in factions. We'll get more hints of this in the next several chapters.
 - d) Again, in order to fix the problems of any church, first one has to understand what is right and wrong in our understanding of God. What is "right" is the knowledge that comes from God. It is supernaturally obtained by believers only. Once we get a glimpse of what God wants for our lives, we can start to eliminate the things that God does not want.
 - i) For the church in Corinth, those issues include factions within the church. There is only one Christian church with different people all preaching the cross, although each may have a different style and emphasis.
 - ii) Paul spends a lot of verses in this chapter dealing with "God's knowledge" versus man's knowledge". The underlying point is that while God's ways seem foolish to many people, His ways are still the correct way to view life.
 - iii) It also sets the foundation of how we are to behave. The decisions we make every day should all have the underlying question, "Is this pleasing to God". It doesn't mean we have to stop and pray prior to every little decision we make. It does mean we pray for God's guidance and study our bible as to what is pleasing to God in all that we do.
 - e) As we'll discover over the rest of this chapter, the Corinthian church had all the tools they needed to please God. The problem is they didn't want to let go of some of their old "customs and habits" and suffered (from God's perspective) for it.

- i) The underlying purpose of this letter is to correct the problems that this church in Corinth dealt with as well as to teach you and I issues for us to watch out for.
- 23. Let's pray: Father, help us to learn what You want us to learn from this letter. Help is to live a life pleasing to You in all that we do. Help us to correct the parts of our lives that are still not pleasing to You. Help us to live for You in all that we do. Help us to remember that it is Your grace working through us and not our own "wisdom". For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.