

Jeff Corinthians 7

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Date: 25 November 2025

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[0:00] Now, I want to do a little case study real quick. We can't trace out all of Paul's Old Testament quotations,!

The first question, you might say, are two Old Testament quotes in verses 19 and verse 31. And both come, what's interesting about this is Paul doesn't just...

Have you talked about the New Testament use of the Old, or how Paul uses the Old Testament? Paul doesn't just grab verses out of the air, proof texts. Nor does any other New Testament writer. They're far more profound in their use of different verses. And so here, both of these verses that he quotes here, come from passages that speak of God acting to judge and to save in ways that defy expectation.

Surprising ways of God acting. Okay? And again, what has Paul just done? He's laid out a paradox, hasn't he? What looks foolish, the cross, is actually what?

[1:28] It's the power of God. Surprising, right? And then, what Paul does is, he sees this paradox prefigured in Scripture.

Okay? So, in verse 19, he quotes Isaiah 29, verse 14. I, for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discerning of the discerning I will thwart.

Now, I want you to keep your finger here and turn over to Isaiah 29. Real quick. Isaiah 29, verse... Well, we'll be looking at verse 14.

Now, again, where's Paul drawing from? And Paul was a brilliant man, a learned man. He had memorized the entire Pentateuch, probably the whole Old Testament.

So, he could draw from his vast knowledge in any place he wanted to. But this text comes, Isaiah 29, comes in a judgment oracle against Judah.

[2:44] Okay? The leaders of Judah are trusting in practical, seemingly wise plans to protect the kingdom. How? Through an alliance with Egypt. Rather than listening to the words of the prophet and trusting God.

Now, verse 14 of Isaiah 29 that Paul quotes makes a vital point. So, the verse that Paul quotes is a great verse.

In other words, it fits his argument, right? But when you grasp the wider context, Paul's critique becomes even more searching. So, let's look at Isaiah 29, verses 13 and 14.

Again, this is a judgment oracle. And the Lord said, Don't let that translation fool you.

Don't let that translation fool you. He's not just, when he says wonderful things, he doesn't mean, Oh, it's going to be all this wonderful stuff. He means mind-blowing stuff, unexpected stuff.

[3:57] I'm going to do, because he's talking about judgment. I'm going to do wonder upon wonder. And the wisdom of their wise men shall perish. And the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.

So, you see Isaiah's point? Religious actions are empty. Their religious talk is cheap.

They're giving lip service to God while their hearts are far from him. What did Paul say in verse 12 of 1 Corinthians? Each of you says.

Each of you says, I follow Paul. And later in the book, what is he going to address? Chapter 14. Their abuse of speech gifts.

Tongues in particular. So, the Corinthians are making a show, both in what they say. I follow Paul. Both in their exaltation of human speech, human eloquence.

[5:01] So, they're all about words. They're all about rhetoric. They're all about eloquence. They're all about tongues. They're making a show of their speech. But their divisions reveal that their hearts are far from God.

Do you see? Isn't Paul brilliant? The Spirit's inspiration is brilliant. So, thus, they, like Judah, is in danger of God's judgment.

Again, verse 14. Therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people. Wonder upon wonder. And their wisdom of their wise men shall perish. And the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.

We could translate that. Shocking and amazing. God's ways are shocking and amazing.

Contrary to what our fallen minds would expect. Do you see? And then, back to 1 Corinthians 1, that's exactly what we see in the gospel.

[6:03] 1 Corinthians 1, 20. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

So, in God's shocking ways, he exploded the world's expectations and pretensions through the foolishness of Paul's proclamation, Christ and him crucified.

Verse 25. Verse 25. For the foolishness of God is weaker than men.

The noun form of that word is in verse 25. It's moria, where we get the English word moron. You know that word? It's not a compliment.

[7:07] The foolishness, it's absurd. Yet, we learn the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

In other words, it becomes... The foolishness of God in the gospel becomes the very mechanism for saving us. And in the process, destroying our wisdom and strength.

Now, that's a bit of a deep dive perhaps for this time in the afternoon. Let me get my clock ahead of me so I don't...

But, you see how rich and profound Paul's argument is and his use of the Old Testament is. He's taking into account the larger... Not just that verse, which fits his argument, but the larger context of that verse.

And even the larger context of that verse and its use of language, talk words, comports with what he's addressing among the Corinthians.

[8:10] So, again, Paul is seeking to undermine their proud identification with leaders by showing the utter inconsistency of such human, worldly wisdom with the gospel.

To think of the gospel in such terms is to utterly distort it. And to preach the gospel with such impressive rhetoric is to empty the cross of its power.

Okay? So, that's the first part of his argument then, as we've seen, to show that the gospel message itself, the word of the cross, contradicts human wisdom.

Undercuts human wisdom. The world's values. That's the first part of his argument. The second part of his argument comes in verse 26 and you see on your outline... So, the message of the gospel contradicts human wisdom.

The recipients of the gospel stand in contrast to human wisdom. Stand in contrast to their boasting and pride. Look with me at verse 26. For consider your calling, brothers.

[9:12] Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many of you were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. This is clever.

Paul invites them to look around and just consider just who they are. It's not flattering. He actually risks offending them.

Which is why I think he begins, consider your calling, brothers. So, he begins warmly. He begins affectionately. Consider your calling, brothers.

And, by the way, he's not... He's actually not speaking of their true value. He wants them to consider who they are by the world's standards.

Consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you are wise according to worldly standards. You know what that phrase is?

[10:15] It's a phrase you probably came across in Paul. Well, you would have come across in Paul many times. The phrase is kata sarka. What does that mean? Kata? Down from according to?

Yeah, according to the flesh. According to the flesh. According to this fallen age. So, consider yourself not in who you really are.

Not in who your value, not your true value in God's eyes. Because you're brothers. We're all in Christ. But consider who you were according to worldly standards, according to the flesh. Who were they?

Well, not many wise. Meaning not many well educated. The sophists and their sorts would belong here.

Not many powerful. So, those who would, from the political realm. Those who would wield influence. Movers and shakers of society.

[11:15] Not many of noble birth. In other words, coming from the upper class. Not an impressive group by worldly standards.

And so, what is he saying to them? You, you yourselves are a perfect illustration. That God's wisdom runs counter to the world's values and undermines human boasting.

Look at yourself. You're proof that God saves stupid people. God didn't come saving the upper class in Corinth.

In Corinth, he saved you. You're an illustration. Your own existence stands in total contradiction to your boasting. And the values you're upholding.

And embracing. Once again, God's pattern of reversal is seen. So, his shocking ways, Isaiah 29. First, deliver people by a foolish message.

[12:19] Now, the message saves not those esteemed by the world, but those who are despised. So, God continues to overthrow expectations and pretensions by creating his new community out of unimpressive people.

Why? Why? Why does he do that? To magnify his unmerited grace.

That's the very logic of the cross. God has so designed the gospel so as to deliberately undercut the wisdom and pride of man.

It's part of the very design of the gospel. It's inner calculus. It's as if God stood back and said, Okay, I want to save people. How can I save them in such a way that humbles man's pride and prevents anyone from boasting?

Hmm. I know what I'll do. I'll do it with the cross. You see what I'm saying? The very calculus of the cross is designed to undermine pride.

[13:35] And so, verse 27. God chose what is foolish to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. And why did he do it? The reason is in verse 29. So that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

That's why he saved us this way. So, again, he keeps raising a mirror to us.

Do we view our own tendencies to pride in this way? Our strivings to be admired. Our love of praise and reputation. When we exalt ourselves and our wisdom or try to appear like we've got it all together.

Try to appear strong or impressive. When we parade our credentials to impress others. We're contradicting the very logic of the gospel.

[14:49] We're trying to bring pride to ourselves, glory to ourselves, instead of seeing that, no, the gospel condemns our pride.

The gospel shows that we're the opposite of impressive. So, pride is not just a small thing.

We're trying to steal for ourselves, glory that belongs to God. So, next time you confess pride to a brother, to a friend, make sure it's not, well, yeah, I was proud.

I was trying to steal God's glory and exalt myself as God. I want worship myself. I want people to bow down and honor me and love me and worship me instead of Christ.

When you put it in those terms, it's convicting, isn't it? That's what's happening. That's Paul's argument. And this leads then to the often misunderstood but powerful verse 30.

[15:57] Look at verse 30. And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus who became, what did we become?

Wisdom. Wisdom to us from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Did that match what you have in your Bible? I have an older version of the ESV and I know they get this wrong and I know they corrected it and so I was trying to remember.

So, who gets credit for our salvation? Verse 30 reads literally, of him, you are in Christ Jesus. You see that emphasis at the beginning of the verse. Of him, XL2, of him you are in Christ Jesus. In other words, it's because of him that you are united to Christ. Because of his work and his grace that you've been joined to Jesus Christ.

[17:02] And from that union, all the blessings of salvation flow. From that union flows our very life. So, it's from him, and then Paul goes on, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

So, in contrast to the Sophia of man, Christ has become Sophia from God. And the three words that follow, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

The key thing I want you to see here, they're not parallel with wisdom. It is not, Christ has become to us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

That's how it's sometimes misunderstood. As if Christ is the source of wisdom for us. So, from him, we get wisdom. We used to have a song in Sovereign Grace.

And it's a fine song, but it can almost imply this. It says, you have, I won't sing it. You have become for us wisdom. You have become for us righteousness. You have become our salvation.

[18:13] You have become our holiness. So, in other words, you've become wisdom, righteousness. When you read it that way, you think, okay, Christ has become wisdom for us from God, so that now I'm wise.

So, he gives me wisdom, and now I'm wiser now. No, that's not what he's saying. He's saying, God has replaced your human wisdom with Christ.

Christ has become wisdom for us. It's not your wisdom, now you're smart. No, God has made Christ wisdom. We don't possess our wisdom that we boast in, that we depend on to navigate life, to make decisions.

Christ is our wisdom. He is what we boast in. So, you either get human wisdom, you don't get human wisdom, and then more insightful Old Testament type wisdom.

Now, with the Holy Spirit, we do get wisdom. We can get wisdom, yes, but that's not what he's saying here. Wisdom that the Corinthians were so enamored by is radically redefined by Paul.

[19:22] It becomes a virtual synonym to salvation. And Paul's going to unpack this in chapter 2, verse 6. We do impart a wisdom. So, in other words, the next three words spell out what this means.

This means, Christ is our wisdom, meaning he became to us righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. God's wisdom is the sin covering, pride humbling, forgiveness granting salvation God accomplished in the cross.

So, wisdom's not a mental attainment. It's the salvation effected in Christ, you see? Wisdom is not getting smart. Wisdom is getting saved. It's renouncing our wisdom.

Renouncing all the values and lusts and cravings of the world. As Paul says in Philippians, counting all things loss. In other words, all things that we previously valued and banked on and trusted in and derived significance from.

It's becoming a fool in the eyes of the world that we might become truly wise. Which means knowing God through Christ. Which changes everything.

[20:42] To those who are called, verse 24, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God. The whole world looks different to those who are saved.

Doesn't it? The whole world looks different. Yes, well, actually, he's just redefining wisdom. You either get the wisdom of the world, or you get Christ.

And thus, you get God. You get saved. You got to remember, when you deal with 1 Corinthians, you got to remember in this Greco-Roman setting what wisdom is.

It's not Old Testament chokmah. Skill. Living life well in this world as God created it and as he rules it.

In other words, fearing God and living life with God. So, he's dealing with Greco-Roman Sophia. So, it's a totally different...this is not Old Testament wisdom.

[21:52] However, I think there is something in the background there that is presaged by Proverbs chapter 8.

And, you know, wisdom being personified and being there at God's right hand creating the world. So, I think that's true.

It's...and it may be in the back of Paul's mind. He just doesn't go there. He doesn't explain it that way. So, if I was preaching that, would I even mention that?

I might not. If I did, it would be an illusion that this is consistent with. You know, even in the Old Testament, points in this direction. That...that wisdom gets personified.

And the one who helped God...was with God creating the world. And that becomes...Jesus becomes that...that wisdom. He fulfills that. So, I'd be...I'd be careful with it. But I...I think one could mention it.

[22:57] You know, it's an excellent connection. Well, yeah, I wouldn't...I wouldn't call it imputed righteousness. Because, I mean, you're...you're using there a theological category that...that may transcend the text.

But I think behind it is the...is the essence of imputed righteousness. Uh...Christ has become to us wisdom from God, meaning...righteousness.

Our...we don't have righteousness in ourselves. Christ becomes our righteousness with God. So, there's...there's a connection there with imputed righteousness.

He is our righteousness. Like... John Bunyan. You know, his...his whole life changed when he's walking across that village green.

And he's...he's burdened with his sin and guilt and condemnation. And he looks up and he says, I...I saw...he looked up and he...he saw, my righteousness is in heaven.

[24:06] In heaven...and in the word...you know...I forget the...I forget exactly his words. And basically, the world opened up for him. And heaven opened up for him. And my righteousness is there.

In other words, my righteousness is Christ. Christ is my righteousness. And then, when you get to 2 Corinthians 5, 21, which you were saying...I think a very similar thing.

He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might be the righteousness of God in him. That we might, we are not the righteousness of God.

It's not that, it means we by Christ emptying himself for us, we attain a right standing with God.

God looks at us and sees righteousness by virtue of Christ. So I think he's just unpacking here the different elements of, I'm just wondering if we, is that on your outline somewhere?

[25:13] Maybe not. But yeah, he has become to us righteousness. We have no righteousness of our own. He's our righteousness. He's our sanctification. Going back to chapter 1, verses 2, he is the one who has set us apart, has affected that.

He is the one who is our redemption. We don't save our, we've been bought by God. What is God, what is Paul going to say in 1 Corinthians 6, verse 20? You have been bought with a price.

Therefore, glorify God with your body. So there's even a forward looking there. So he's basically summing up all that Christ has done for us in saving us on the cross.

Well, I think 2 Corinthians 5 is one of the key texts on imputed righteousness. And I think it's an implication of this.

Paul is just not, he just doesn't unpack that aspect of it. Yeah. No, good. It's a great question. So again, you see for Paul, the issue is much more profound, much more serious than boasting in your favorite preacher.

[26:32] By their divisions, they're showing their misunderstanding of the gospel itself. And the fact that God saved them of all people, not wise, not strong, not noble, but foolish, weak.

Shouldn't that tell them that the gospel contradicts the world and its pride and its values? Shouldn't it tell them that the cross judges the world and its values and its pride?

So, the message itself contradicts human wisdom. The recipients contradict human wisdom. And finally, the third part of Paul's argument here, Paul's preaching and his effective ministry among them stand in contrast to wisdom.

And here, oh, my brothers, Paul gives us a compelling and countercultural paradigm of ministry. Chapter 2, verses 1 to 5.

And when I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom so that I don't drain the cross of its power.

[27:49] No, I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom.

By now, you're beginning to hear this vocabulary, aren't you? But in demonstration of the Spirit and of power so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

There's power again. So, again, Paul is drawing contrast. And in this ancient setting, a public speaker's, I mentioned this a moment ago, but a public speaker's initial visit to a city was key. It was key to him making a mark, establishing his reputation. So, orators would come to town and they would get invitations to pagan banquets.

They would offer entertainment between the courses for those in attendance. That was a gig for them. Do you know that word gig? Yeah, this was their gig.

[28:56] They come to town. They make an impressive show in the marketplace. They get invited to these things. They're getting a following. They're getting money. So they would promote their brand.

They would compete for applause. If they would have had social media, they would be social influencers. Striving for clicks and likes and Instagram followers and views on YouTube.

That's who they were. And the Corinthians wanted their pastors to be this way. Does that sound familiar? How different was Paul's approach?

He did not come to get gigs to build his esteem, to impress, to cater to their tastes.

And this paragraph is actually full of rhetorical terms and references common to the day. Lofty speech, verse 1. I did not come with lofty speech.

[29:55] Wisdom, verse 4. Plausible words, verse 4. My message were not implausible words of wisdom.

Better, persuasive words. Demonstration of the Spirit, verse 4. All of those are rhetorical terms. So Paul's taking their language and turning it on his head.

All this stuff, all this rhetoric, all this eloquence that you love, I did the opposite. He's not promoting himself.

He's not projecting himself. He wants to project Christ. In other words, in the context of Paul's argument, his manner matched his message.

Paul wanted the way he conducted himself, how he presented himself, he wanted that presentation to be consistent with the message. This is the message of a crucified Messiah.

[31:02] Foolishness to Greek. It offends their sensibilities, and it's meant to. Right? So how could Paul then, in presenting a message that offended their sensibilities, how could Paul present himself in a way that was impressive to them?

You see the inconsistency. Indeed, to be saved, you must become a fool. In other words, you must recognize your need, your utter weakness, your utter helplessness.

So how could Paul then come around and present himself as strong and wise and clever and eloquent and capable? It would be a denial of the very gospel he is proclaiming.

So that preacher I was talking about yesterday, he wore the best clothes, hung with celebrity Christians, like Justin Bieber, and NBA players like Kevin Durant, and he'd bring them into the green room.

He's projecting himself in a way that contradicts the gospel he supposedly proclaims. Gordon Fee, one of the commentators I mentioned, underlines this point.

[32:17] His own weaknesses served as a further visible demonstration of the same message, meaning the message of a crucified Messiah. But even more, to demonstrate that the message was of divine, not human origin.

Thus, the apostle regularly glories in his own weaknesses, not because he enjoyed ill health, but because they were a sure evidence that the power was of God and not himself.

And even more seriously, he would draw his listeners' eyes to himself and away from Christ. Verse 5, that your faith, this is why he did it, why did you do it that way, Paul?

You like, you like, you're a masochist, you like hardship? No. Here's why. That your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

That you might not think that the message of the gospel is just another socially acceptable message, just like all the other things that are being proclaimed by these sophists.

[33:31] No. And so to adopt the culture's priorities risks placing people's faith in those priorities. Brothers, if I came to you like those guys, I would further reinforce your infatuation with those values.

I didn't want to do that. I'm trying to undercut your infatuation with those values. So it risks cutting people off from the very message they need to hear.

A message that exalts not man, but Christ. A message that exposes their sin and their love of themselves and the world.

Indeed, a message that delivers them from their sin and the world. Now let's pause as men training for pastoral ministry and just say there are a few paragraphs more important for us in that context than these five verses.

We talk in, we are in sovereign grace so grateful we are gospel centered. May we ever remain so. But a burden I do carry, and I've carried it for a while, for our churches, for the students I teach, for the pastors I train, is that gospel centeredness not become an empty slogan.

[35:01] A statement on a website. A theme for a conference. And yet, ceased to be a reality in the lives of our people, especially pastors.

Now I don't know if it's the case here in Ethiopia, but in the States, in the past 15 years or so, gospel centrality has become common.

Gospel centrality is everywhere. Books about the gospel. Conferences about the gospel.

Organizations dedicated to the gospel. Now, that's a blessing.

I celebrate that. I think it's a move of God's spirit. I really do. Whenever there is an increased awareness of the gospel and an attentiveness to the gospel, that's something only God can bring about.

But, it's that very prominence that creates this burden. Because, it's possible, and you guys need to know this as gospel centered guys, it's possible to discuss and to feature and to celebrate the gospel and yet, fail, and preach about it.

[36:22] And yet, fail to allow the gospel to genuinely shape you, to genuinely shape your life, your home, your marriage, your ministry, your churches.

James, that's what James warns about, doesn't he? This very thing in James chapter 1, that very familiar verse 22, speaking about being a doer, not merely a hearer.

Be doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, what's he like?

Like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror, he looks at himself, goes away, forgets what he looks like. And what James has in mind in that context is the gospel.

The previous verse speaks of the implanted, receiving the implanted word which is able to save your souls. So he's talking about the gospel. So the gospel, the implanted word that gives life, it's meant to be received and explored and spoken, yes, but it's also to be responded to and applied, not just heard or preached about and forgotten.

[37:41] Not heard and celebrated and written about and featured in conferences but left unapplied to one's soul, unapplied to one's ministry.

Assumed but not specifically and intentionally applied in every aspect of one's church. That's the burden that I have and with a new gospel pervasiveness among evangelicals, it's a danger.

I think we're all vulnerable to. And so I don't want to move past these five verses without reflecting upon it a bit more.

We've seen Paul's argument but I want to draw special attention to what he says in verse two. Paul makes a categorical statement that describes both his deportment, his conduct and his proclamation among the Corinthians when he planted this church.

This is a former church planter. What does he say? Verse two, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[38:56] So this statement governed Paul's ministry among the Corinthians. both the conduct of his ministry and the content of his ministry.

The two were consistent. No contradiction, no incongruity between the two. They're both governed. His life and his message are governed by the same glorious reality, the gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

So against this setting of these professional philosopher teachers, Paul self-consciously stood out from the crowd. So personally, he renounced self-promotion and self-aggrandizement. Methodologically, he rejected culturally conditioned forms of communication and self-display. Substantively, he allowed Jesus Christ and him crucified to control everything he said. Now, I find that refreshingly clarifying. And in my own experience as a pastoral ministry, I found his perspective clarifying pastorally and fruitful personally.

[40:21] So this text defines Paul's ministry and it provides a wonderful paradigm for pastoral ministry, in particular, a paradigm for pastoral priorities.

So regardless of who you are, regardless of the context in which you serve, regardless of the complexities you face, the challenges, social challenges, economic challenges, spiritual challenges that you face, Paul's perspective here is relevant for you in Otis.

It's relevant for me in the U.S. And it's decisive. So let me just make a few observations. I just jotted a few of these things down on your outline. First, about Paul's statement.

First, what's the statement? It's Christ and him crucified. Why does he say that? There's a specificity to Paul's message, a specificity to Paul's Christology.

He didn't just talk about Jesus. Jesus is a compelling figure. Jesus is a warm friend.

[41:32] Jesus is a social reformer. Jesus is a great moral teacher. In America, I mean, gracious, it's common to speak of a post-Christian culture, greatly secularized, which is only accelerated.

Still, there's a residue in our setting of our Christian past. There's still many Christians, but even among non-Christians, there's a familiarity with Jesus, at least an awareness of Jesus, often positive thoughts about Jesus.

But Paul and we don't just preach a generic Jesus. Paul's fundamental message was Christ and him crucified. In other words, we can't know Jesus at all until we know him as mediator, until we know him as our substitute on the cross for our sins, paying the divine penalty for our sins, reconciling us to God.

So, whatever Jesus you're preaching, if it's not Christ and him crucified, you may be getting Jesus wrong. Paul's priority. So, there's a specificity to the message that was Paul's priority.

Second, was Paul's determination, his determination to keep this message central. This is very insightful. Verse 2, I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[42:56] A better translation might be, I resolved NIV. I determined New American Standard. You see what he's saying?

He made a self-conscious decision to prioritize the gospel of Christ and him crucified. He deliberately chose to subordinate other messages.

Anything that would distract from Christ, he set it aside. He rejected any message or methods that would showcase his own knowledge, his own wisdom. Brothers, that does not happen naturally. It does not happen because you graduated from the pastor's college. We gravitate the other way. We gravitate toward knowing a lot of other things, showing what we know, showing others how impressive we are.

In other words, this requires resolve. For Paul, it required courage. Because by doing so, he subjected himself to criticism, to humiliation, to rejection.

[44:13] rejection. And it required resolve because there's so much in Christian ministry that can be disheartening and discouraging.

Things happen to you as a pastor. They can leave you disoriented and bewildered. And they can leave you vulnerable to looking up and looking around for other priorities, substitutes, other emphases that maybe will get some people visiting us.

Catering to people. Oh, there's some visitors here. They've been here a few weeks. They really have this burden. Well, I better make sure they know. I want to cater to...

No. And the landscape is filled with temptations to this end. Books rolling off evangelical presses, barraging us with innovative strategies and newfound secrets, showcasing solutions to pastoral dilemmas.

Here, read my book. Here is how my church grew from 10 people meeting in a living room to 5,000 people in five years. You could do it too.

[45:50] Of course, we can learn from others. It's blessing and pastoral wisdom from others, but here's the danger, and it's subtle. We can invest that wisdom, that insight, that strategy with hope that should only be reserved for the gospel.

If there's any positive change, any God glorifying fruit, here it's going to come from the gospel and not my methods. The gospel is the only message that God promises to accompany with saving and transforming power.

power. There's a personal dimension to this as well. We must resolve personally not to move on from the gospel.

We must resolve personally not to allow the gospel to be assumed in our minds and hearts. Left behind in my further studies of covenantal theology or apologetics or cultural studies or missiological insights or church history or whatever captures our imagination.

We have to ensure that the gospel continues to have its appropriate effects in our lives, producing gratefulness to God.

[47:20] If you're not grateful, you find yourself grumbling, the gospel's not functioning. Kindling affections for God.

If you find yourself cold, weary, the gospel's not functioning. You find yourself condemned.

Is God for me? Is he? The gospel's not functioning because it assures us of the love of God. If you're proud, the gospel's not functioning because the gospel produces humility.

Paul's going to say in chapter 4, verse 7, what do we have that we have not received? Over the long term, you will not proclaim the gospel fruitfully and pastor people with the gospel effectively if the gospel is not precious to you personally.

Don't get skillful at creating sermons if the gospel's not precious to you. And that's done every week. And I'm sure I've done it.

[48:39] I will say this, by the grace of God, the older I get, I'm not more mature, I'm not more godly, I just, I'm more desperate. I'm more desperate.

I'll be honest with you, just real practical, I was asked to have a breakfast this week with someone and I just, it was like, I just can't. I've got to have my mornings. I can't get up here and teach if I've not seen Christ and he's not precious to me and I've not connected and I know he's with me and I know I'm in him and he's with me and I'm moving into this position right now.

I'm coming in in faith. He's with me. He wants to bless. He's precious to me. I just can't do it. Can't pretend. Sometimes you have to.

You have a funeral. You get two hours to prepare your message in the middle of the night on Saturday and sometimes you drag yourself up. Yes, you're, but you're trusting God. Trusting God. I've got to, but I just, the older I get, I, whoo, and it's not just, oh, I want to be like Paul. I want the gospel to be precious. No, I just, I got to have him. I got to be close to him.

[49:57] My, I got to have my heart stirred because my heart gets cold. No more important pastoral priority for you than to kindle affections for Christ.

That's it. Which means you need to find ways to stoke that resolve because weariness will set in. Discouragement will happen. You're going to grow cold. We're, we're fallen people, right?

We're weak. We battle the, the world, the flesh, the devil. There's everything, nothing in this world kindles affection for Christ. Everything in this world is against affections for Christ.

So you, as a pastor, you have to pursue it. Find ways to stoke that resolve.

Find ways to remind yourself of the gospel. Ways to rekindle gratefulness and amazement and joy. Joy particular verses in the Bible.

[50:58] I, I, I go, you should see the Psalms in my Bible. I, so often I'm reading in my Bible and have a Bible reading plan, but so often I'm not so wedded to it that it's like I'm in my third reading of the day and, and

I'm just, oh, the clock is ticking and I'm going to have to leave soon and my heart is not warmed.

And so I go, where do I go? I go to Psalm 25. I go to Psalm 27. I go to Psalm 62. I go to Psalm 63. I just have these go-to Psalms. I know if I go there, I'm going to, I'm going to engage with God.

And so you got to know those go-to places. John 15, five. I was there this morning. In fact, I was in Psalm 62. I was tired this morning and little stomach issue.

And so it's like, okay, I can't just do, I can't just be in Kings this morning. I got to go to Psalm 62 and John 15 and I put them together and it was like explosive for me. It's like, yes.

So you got to find that in particular books that have affected you and not just books, chapters, paragraphs, maybe books on the shelf. You read it 50 times, but you pull it off, you go to that dog-eared page, you read that page and it just connects to you.

[52:13] Certain authors will have that effect on you. In other words, you need to have strategies in place that you can run to when you sense your heart growing cool to Christ and cool to what he's done for you and cool to all he promises to be for you.

You know what I mean, don't you? Finally, on this, a third observation. There's Paul's specificity, there's his resolve, and then there's also, let us see, his exclusive focus.

There is an exclusivity to his focus here. I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

It's not just that the cross was the most important topic, although it was.

1 Corinthians 15, I deliver to you as a first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day. So yes, he was number one. So for Paul, only the gospel is of first importance.

[53:22] There are many topics of some importance, only one topic of first importance. That's the gospel. Get that clear. But beyond being the most important topic, it was the governing topic of Paul's ministry.

Nothing except Jesus Christ. So in other words, you see, it's not just number one in a hierarchy of subjects. There's one, there's two, there's three, there's four, there's five. No, it was the one subject that governed all the subjects.

So put all the subjects on a vertical line, I mean on a horizontal line, there's this subject and this subject and this subject and this subject, and then ruling over them all is Christ and him crucified.

We must take Paul utterly seriously here. This is not hyperbole. This is not exaggeration. I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean that Paul never addressed other topics. He was there for 18 months. He taught them on all manner of things. And we'll see from the rest of the letter, Paul addresses many issues, doesn't he?

[54:29] So it doesn't mean he doesn't address other issues, think about other issues, study other issues, take other classes in the PC. No. But what it does mean is that Paul addressed no topic unrelated to the gospel or in isolation from the gospel or uninformed by the gospel.

Regardless of the topic, all that Paul taught proceeded from and was connected to the gospel. And I think that's implied both by Paul's words here and it's evident in the way he addresses occasional topics in this letter, especially in his letters, especially in this letter.

Now, I mentioned in our introduction, the model of pastoral discernment this letter gives us.

And as we said earlier, so many of the issues in play are not explicitly theological. They're not arguing over Christology. People in Corinth are just thinking and living in ways entirely normal in the Greco-Roman city, depending on the court system to resolve disputes, accepting invitations to pagan banquets.

Paul's genius, again, is he diagnoses those problems in theological terms. He exposes them to the light of the gospel. And so to those engaged in sexual immorality, how does he apply the gospel to it?

[55:58] Don't you know your bodies are templated in the Holy Spirit? It's an implication of the gospel. You are not your own. You are bought with a price. That's gospel, right?

You're redeemed. So God owns you. So you can't do whatever you want. Implication of the gospel. The gospel is, in other words, the gospel is more than just a message.

The gospel is a worldview. That helps us think about everything else. Back to the letter.

We've walked through Paul's argument, 1.18 to 2.5. Now, understanding the flow, then, of his argument helps give us a proper understanding of this popular passage, chapter 2, verses 10 to 16. This is often seen as a contrast between those who are truly spiritual, Christians who are really spiritual, versus Christians who are not so spiritual.

[57:06] And sometimes the way that's conceived of is that, and I've heard this many times, Christians who are really spiritual, in other words, they are in touch with God, and they have spiritual experiences, and they rely on the spirit.

And those who are not so spiritual, you know what they rely on? Well, they like doctrine. They're fleshly.

They like mental. They invest themselves in a lot of mental activity. No, no, no. I'm above that. I'm a spirit person. That's a completely unacceptable interpretation.

And it comes from, among other things, a misunderstanding of the word mature in verse 6. Yet among the mature, we do impart wisdom.

Although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are doomed to pass away. So Paul is not distinguishing between, this is what's key to understanding this, he's not distinguishing between mature Christians and immature Christians.

[58:28] In the flow of the argument, there's only two types of people. There are Christians and there are non-Christians. So why does Paul use mature to describe Christians in verse 6?

The reason is that his opponents viewed themselves as mature. Right? They were glorying in human sophia or captivated by cultural mores or even exalted in their own personal spiritual experience.

So by such things, they thought of themselves as truly spiritual. Paul says, no, the real mature ones are those who have the spirit.

It's the spirit that makes the difference. That's his argument. And the wisdom he speaks here of in verse 6, we do speak a wisdom among the mature.

What's, in the context, what wisdom does he mean? The same wisdom he's already referred to. Which is what? Yes.

[59:45] The wisdom of God in the cross of Christ. And what the spirit does is reveal that as wisdom and not folly.

It's the spirit who opens our eyes to see in the gospel something real and true and glorious. Christ and the salvation he offers. So, to look at things from a merely human perspective with merely human wisdom or in terms of superficial cleverness like the sophist is no wisdom at all.

That's Paul's argument. In fact, if you look at things that way, you'll miss God's wisdom which is revealed by the spirit. You won't perceive in the message of Christ crucified something glorious and true.

You'll be blind to it. You'll reject it. It will be to you foolishness without the spirit. So, let's look then at the reasoning.

Verses 9 to 15. But as it is written, what no eye has seen, no ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.

[61:00] These things God has revealed to us through the spirit. For the spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thought except the spirit of that person which is in him?

So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the spirit of God. Now, we have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit who is from God that we might understand the things freely given to us by God.

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the spirit interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the spirit of God for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The spiritual person judges all things but is himself to be judged by no one. Now, this is a dense text but note just a couple of things.

Verse 12. Look at verse 12. Now, we have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit who is from God that we might understand the things freely given to us by God.

[62:12] How do you understand God's revelation? Easy question. By the spirit of God.

Exactly. That's how we understand. Now, verse 14 and 15. The natural person does not accept the things of the spirit of God for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The spiritual person judges all things. In other words, there's only two possible responses to the revelation of God. You either accept them or you reject them.

What makes the difference? The spirit. Yes. Whether you're natural or whether you're spiritual. So again, he's not contrasting two kinds of Christians.

One who's carnal, one who's godly. Or worse, one who loves theology and thinks a lot versus one who just loves experience.

[63:13] Now, in the context here, Paul is contrasting a man without the Holy Spirit and one with the Spirit. In other words, a non-Christian and a Christian. Only a person with the Holy Spirit, only a person who's renewed and enlightened by the Spirit responds to God's revelation.

The natural man, the one without the Spirit, not only does he not respond, he cannot respond. That's the argument.

And I'll just add, I do want to add, just by way of broader application, there's a secondary application here to us and to your own study of God's Word and our own training and our learning of theology. With all the reading and memorization and writing of papers that we do, it's only the activity of the Holy Spirit who leads us in the truth. It's not exactly what Paul's talking about here, but it is, I think, an appropriate secondary application.

Regardless of your training, regardless of your intellect, you will err in your interpretation of Scripture. You will err in your theology. You will err in your preaching without the guiding, illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, which keeps us dependent.

[64:36] I mentioned John 15 a moment ago. John 15, 5, it's a verse I think I say in my, remind myself of or think of or say every day, almost, I don't want to say every day, maybe there's one, but almost every day of my life.

I'm the vine, you're the branches, he abides in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

He doesn't say apart from me you can do some things, not as much, but some. Apart from me you can preach pretty good sermons, not as good, but pretty good.

Apart from me you can be a pretty good pastor, maybe not as good as you could have been. No, apart from me you can do nothing. A Scottish-born theologian who had a massive influence in America in the first part of the 20th century, John Murray, he was a staunch reformed theologian, not a continuationist by any stretch.

However, he emphasized this point as strongly as any continuationist would. the scriptures cannot be properly interpreted without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, nor can they be properly studied as God's revelation apart from the sealing witness of the Spirit by whom alone we can be convinced that they are the word of God.

[66:09] The person who addresses himself to the interpretation and formulation of the truth conveyed to us by revelation, he's talking about you, he's talking about me, he's talking about pastors, he's talking about theologians, the person who addresses himself to the interpretation and formulation of the truth conveyed to us by revelation, listen to this, is destitute, and he doesn't have it, he's destitute of the prime requisite.

In other words, the number one thing you need in order to do these things, you don't have it if you're not imbued with the humility and enlightenment which the Holy Spirit, which the indwelling of the Holy Spirit imparts.

That's sobering. We lack the main thing. If you go forward in pride, if you go forward in independence, you're going to lack the number one thing you need.

So it's sobering. But it also imparts hope to us. With the Spirit, we can proceed in confidence. It's with the Spirit's help we have the prime requisite for interpreting and formulating truth.

Abraham Kuyper, the great Dutch theologian, made a similar statement. The Holy Spirit has not merely given us a book. Every theology student needs this quote. The Holy Spirit has not merely given us a book and then withdrawn himself from our human scene of action, but that same Holy Spirit continues to be our leader.

[67:44] And in the very freedom of the action of our Spirit causes His dominion to triumph. Now we see the effects of the Spirit's work in the, well, this wonderfully encouraging conclusion of chapter 2, verse 16.

For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him? Who has known the mind of the Lord?

He's actually quoting there from Isaiah chapter 40, verse 13. You remember Isaiah 40? That great chapter in Isaiah at the turn of the book.

You'll remember that chain of rhetorical questions that the prophet asks that stress the chasm between God and man.

God created everything. He rules everything. He holds the oceans in the palm of His hand. He marks off the heavens with a span, meaning thumb to little finger.

[69:04] The heavens, the universe, the millions of light years, it's right there. The nations, there's a dust on the scale. You ever seen a scale?

Do you worry about the dust on it? You can't even see the dust on it, right? You don't go, oh no, it's off. Well, it's so inconsequential. It doesn't change the scale. Well, that's what the nations are like. They mean nothing. Who knows God's saving plans? Who can be God's counselor? But, in the context of Isaiah chapter 40, God's not shaming them.

This is the chapter that begins, comfort, oh, comfort to my people. He's challenging them to trust him. The context is the announcement of comfort and salvation for Israel.

How appropriate for Paul, how insightful for Paul to draw upon this and to speak of what the Spirit has revealed to us.

[70:15] Not just natural deliverance for Israel, but final salvation for all people in Christ.

That is the wisdom which God has revealed to us. The gospel of Christ. Again, not some esoteric knowledge reserved for the few and the elite, but a grasp of the message of the cross and the salvation it has bought.

And so we now have, verse 16, the mind of Christ.

What does that mean? that mean? I have sure heard lofty claims for it.

We have the mind of Christ. Obviously not the full knowledge that Christ has, right?

[71:31] Not deep, mysterious insights some prophets claim to have. Mind here is not our brains. Mind here is not an instrument of thought.

No, mind here means a mindset. A grasp of God's, what's the context?

A grasp of God's profound wisdom regarding salvation through a crucified Messiah which was hidden but now is revealed by the Holy Spirit.

That's what we have. And I'm sure you covered this in pneumatology, but there is no more important work of the Holy Spirit than this, to glorify Christ by opening our eyes to the gospel.

By helping us to see him and helping us to see ourselves and the world and everything in light of Christ and that gospel.

[72:47] To come and to convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. to bring to our remembrance things that Christ has said.

To point to Christ. To make Christ precious in our hearts and preeminent in our wills.

That's what the Spirit does. It gives us the mind of Christ, a grasp of what God has done in Christ.

What that means for life. That's what we have. There he's speaking about chapter 4 verse 3 Paul says with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.

So or by any human court helps to fill that out. In other words to reach a conclusion about Paul to judge him to assess him as lacking as illegitimate.

[74:00] Here in verse 15 the spiritual person judges all things what he's saying is that the person who has the Spirit is able to assess all things accurately by viewing them in light of Christ.

The spiritual person judges all things. He assesses all things meaning he assesses all things rightly. He assesses all things in light of God's wisdom. Remember look at the contrast verse 14 the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God they're folly to him he can't even understand them because they are spiritually discerned in other words they are discerned by the Holy Spirit's illumination.

The spiritual person is able to judge all things because he has the Spirit and he's able to see all things because he sees Christ and he sees all things in light of Christ and he's able to bring an appropriate Christ centered assessment of all things.

Yet he himself is judged by no one. So there's almost a double entendre there. He uses the word differently. He assesses All things he judges!

He sees all things clearly yet he himself is judged by no one. Meaning those people of the world who would assess him to be illegitimate, assess him to be foolish, assess him to be foolish, a fool, not wise, not strong, not mighty.

[75:29] No, he is not affected by that judgment at all. Those are misjudgments. Does that make sense? All right, so how does this fit in with the elder requirement 1 Timothy 3 that a pastor must be apt to teach, able to teach, I mentioned yesterday, skillful in teaching.

What he's speaking about there is not the ability, not a polished public ability, but an ability to effectively teach.

And as I said yesterday, I think I was mentioning out of a view that, in other words, because some people can take that A.B. A.B.

That's the nickname, even though it's A.B. A.B. Okay, that's where my mind goes. But I've heard some people say, I've seen people in the church and they actually say they lecture, they teach at a college, and so they're able to stand up and dispense information.

That doesn't necessarily make them skillful in teaching as a pastor. Here's what I mean by that.

[76:53] It's not just an ability to dispense information or to be comfortable in front of people or to be impressive in your, you know. Again, Titus 1.9, it fills it out.

Titus is a little bit, Paul's a little bit more explicit to Titus. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it.

So, what's in view for a pastoral, that gift of teaching is an ability to make the truth of God clear to people.

And because if you fill out the other commandments to Timothy and to Titus, there's all, and you look at other words used for preaching in the New Testament, you also see the word exhortation. Give yourself to teaching and exhortation. So, we're not just giving information, we're exhorting in the truth. In other words, we're impressing upon people there's a particular urgency involved.

[78:00] This is not just information that a professor gives, this is truth. So, I want, I think, what's in that skillful in teaching is the ability to make truth clear so people get it.

And if you could have the most godly guy in your church, and you may think, man, this dude, what? What a godly man, what an example. But if he's not able to make the truth of God clear to people, then he's just not called to be a pastor.

That doesn't make him less than, it's just not his gift. So, you have to be able to, so there is an intellectual gifting that comes with the gift of teaching.

In other words, you have to be able to understand the truth and make it clear. But I think it's more than that because Timothy over and over again is called to exhort in sound doctrine, then we're also making that truth compelling to people.

So, we make God's word clear so that people can understand it. We show God's truth to be beautiful so people love it. So, they feel its urgency, they see its beauty, they hear it and they think, I love that, I want to know that, I want to be that way, you know, so there's that exhortation thing.

[79:19] And then I think you need to be able to make it practical so people can live it. So, if I'm just, maybe I'm a, maybe the guy is a brilliant theologian and he speaks and it's over everyone's head and it's abstract and he's pondered connections that no one else has, praise God, put him in the classroom.

But if, if he stays there and no one gets it and no one sees the implications for their lives and no one says, oh, wow, I see, I see what this means for me.

This penetrates my heart. This convicts me of sin. This encourages my soul. This gives me perspective on my job. This, this strengthens my merit, you know, so there's an ability to discern the implications of truth and show those to people so that they can grasp it and apply it and live it.

So, I'm combining there a few things. I'm combining there other words for the teaching gift, other words for preaching. I'm combining there other things that Paul commands in the pastoral epistles. So, when you put it all together, I think that's the kind of teaching he has in mind for the, for the elder. That sort of teaching gift. This guy teaches and people get it and they, they love it.

[80:44] They're, they're motivated and it, it helps them. It changes the way they live. He's a pastor. Is that helpful? Yeah, there's, there's a particular phrase that we, we actually looked at yesterday.

Well, Paul talks about the doctrine that is in accordance with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that, that, that little phrase just is explosive.

It, it says that there is a, there, there is sound teaching that flows, that leads to the gospel, it points to the gospel and, and it, and it, it makes clear the gospel and it's flows from the gospel.

So, so much of the teaching, for instance, in the new Testament is, it's gospel centered in that it's, it's unveiling the implications of the gospel.

So there's plenty of imperatives, things we're supposed to do, right? Commands in the new Testament. But what's the structure of those commands? The structure of, especially the Pauline ethic is what was, what was seen many, many years ago, what's called the indicative and the imperative, right?

[82:12] The indicative and imperative. And that's, that's how Paul always, always approaches ethics. There is the statement of a truth and then the, the indicative, this is true. And then the imperative flows from it.

So great example, Philippians chapter two, um, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Work it out. What does fear and trembling mean?

Fear and trembling. Take it seriously, right? There's a lot at stake here. Work it out. This is serious. For, that's the imperative. For, what's the indicative?

God is at work in you, both to will and to do for you, for his good pleasure. So God is at work in you. So work it out. Um, so, in other words, that's gospel centered.

Exhortation. Obey because God has made it possible for you to obey. God has, God has made you right with him. He's given you his spirit and now we, we can obey.

[83:23] So all, in other words, all doctrine, as, as I said, we, we don't, Paul talked about many other things. Colossians 1 15.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation for by him all things were made. Things invisible, invisible, where the thrones, dominions, rulers, thorns, all things were created by him and for him.

And he's the head of the body of the church. I mean, just lofty stuff, right? This doctrine. But it's in accord with the gospel. He's unpacking who Jesus is. Um, and it's very important to know about things about the nature of Christ, human and divine in one person.

Why? Because if we get that wrong, we end up getting the gospel wrong. We end up getting the Christian life wrong. Uh, so I, I, I think you, I don't, I'm either, I think you know the answer.

And another, well, what I think is your question revealed an important issue that yes, we are studying. We, we do study to show ourself approved.

[84:33] Uh, we, we get, we, we teach and learn and pass on all this sound doctrine, sound doctrine, healthy teaching, um, that is in accord with the gospel that is in accord with godliness.

Yes. Yes. We, we get all that because all of that defines the gospel. It, it, it defines the raw materials of the gospel, the kind of God we believe in that gives rise to the gospel that this, this, the nature of man and our predicament.

So if, if you get the nature of man wrong, you get the gospel wrong. Because if man is not fallen, if man is not sinful, if man is not subject to God's judgment, but man is, is, is innately good and pure, what happens?

The gospel changes. That's how the gospel, that's how the social gospel got distorted. Uh, the social gospel said, no, man, man is not in need of forgiveness. Man is in need of physical help. Man is in need of education. Education's the answer. People are not sinful. They're ignorant. So that's just the getting the doctrine of man wrong. So all of a sudden now you get the doctrine of man wrong.

[85:43] People need education. Ignorance all over the world. That's the problem with the world. Then all of, oh, well then what did Jesus come to do? Well, he came to make us wise.

He came to show us how to live wisely instead of saving us from our sins. So all of that to say that the sound doctrine, it, we, we, Paul addressed many other issues, but he addressed no issue apart from the gospel or disconnected from the gospel.

I think that's our charge. We, we study many other things that will be life-giving because God's word is life-giving, that will be helpful, that will protect the gospel, but, but we never do it disconnected from the gospel that makes our knowledge possible, that makes God's truth intelligible, that makes God's commands gracious.

Is that helpful? I think you knew that, but I'll just repeat what you know so we can keep, yeah, yeah, it's a good question.