

Jeff Corinthians 6

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 November 2025

Preacher: Jeff Purswell

[0 : 00] We were looking at the address and how significant it was, and as we said, there's no address! more elaborate to a church than what Paul does here with 1 Corinthians. When we get to verse 4, we get to the thanksgiving portion of the letter. And I just want you to note that again, it's not simply formal. Paul continues to pastor the Corinthians in this section. He takes traditional elements, as we said, and he expands this thanksgiving section, which he does in all of his letters except, which one? What's the one letter with no thanksgiving?

Galatians, that's exactly right. This is one of his more elaborate thanksgiving introductions, and I'd say one of the most strategic. Paul gets a lot of things done in this paragraph, and I've laid out for you on your outlines just a few. First of all, he expresses his heart for them. Look at verse 4. I give thanks to my God always for you. Always for you. This is typical Paul, and this is instructive pastoring. Regardless, I mean, think about what he's going to cover in this church. He gives thanks for them. So regardless of deep, before he deals with any problems, any issues, any sin, he wants them first to know of his heart for them. He is not indifferent towards them. He's not irritated by them. He's not impatient with them. He gives thanks for them, and he does so upon today. He does so always. So he's gone from Corinth, but they're not a distant memory for him.

They're not some previous phase in his ministry, an almost forgotten church in the past for Paul. No. One of the marks, and I mentioned this earlier about apostolic ministry, one of the marks of Paul's ministry as an apostle was that he never moved on from a church that he planted. He wasn't simply an evangelist who preached the gospel and then moved on. He wasn't a church planter who formed congregations and then released them. No, he carried them on his heart. He prayed for them constantly. He stayed in touch with them consistently, either through letter or through an assistant. In 2 Corinthians, I mentioned this yesterday, 2 Corinthians 11, verse 28. He mentions among his sufferings the daily pressure on him of anxiety for all the churches. And note Paul, note his manner here. He doesn't keep this to himself. He communicated his care and concern and his gratefulness. We learned something there as a pastor.

And I don't care what culture you are in. I don't care what's typical for a pastor and the people that, you know, I don't care if it's a shame culture or not. Pastors need to communicate to their people, their heart, his heart for them. And I will tell you something, people's responsiveness to your care as a pastor will to a large degree be dependent upon their sense that you care for them, that you are grateful for them.

And when people know you're grateful, their hearts are going to be more open to your preaching, their hearts are going to be more open to your counsel, their hearts are going to be more open to your correction. We don't exercise authority over people as a pastor.

[4 : 03] I'm a pastor because of our office. I'm a pastor. You're not. You do what I say. That's not how it works. We are their servants. And we need to make sure, we need to build relational bridges with people that then open their hearts to us.

And one of the ways that we do that is communicating our gratefulness to them. So people need to know that you don't view them as a project. People need to know you don't view them as a problem. They're not, they need to know you're, they're not a burden to you. And we communicate that by our words. We communicate that by our facial expression.

We communicate that by how we interact with people. Are you always in a hurry? Always moving forward? People want to talk to you and say, excuse me, I don't have time. You just, you give the impression that you're a busy man, you're an important man, and they don't matter.

Years ago, CJ, my senior pastor taught me this. He used to speak about just when you're, when you come in on a Sunday, maybe you've heard this from Michael, but walk slowly. Walk slowly. Don't, don't make people think, oh, you're important. You've got a lot to do. You're busy.

[5 : 28] You're busy. Whenever someone says, I know you're busy. I know you're busy. I always correct them. I'm no busier than you. We all have our stuff. But I'm no busier than you. Everyone's busy. Right?

So I just love Paul's, Paul's model here. His church is clearly new of his care for them. And more than that, his gratefulness for them. So just stop and ask yourselves, do the people I serve know that I am grateful for them?

When's the last time you told people in your small group, people that you're maybe serving in a ministry, maybe you're pastoring, do they know I'm grateful?

Don't keep it to yourself. Do they know that you view them as a gift from God? They need to know that. Secondly, again, Paul is continuing to pastor in his thanksgiving.

The second thing he does, he grounds them in God's grace through Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.

[6 : 34] So after the salutation in the first three verses, along with the thanksgiving, the first thing he mentions is the gospel. So he gives thanks to them because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus.

The most important thing about them, the most important thing about any church, the most important thing about any Christian is not them or what they've done or how well they performed or how godly they are, how big and impressive they are.

No, the most important thing about them is what God has done for them. And what he's done for them is give them grace in Christ Jesus. That's what Paul is most grateful for.

And that's what we should be grateful for in others. And that's not just what you say, it's what you know. So that will help you be grateful.

Here's what I know about this person. If they're a Christian, then you know grace has been given to them in Christ Jesus. So don't, if you look at them, don't see across their forehead, sinner.

[7 : 46] Don't see across their forehead, problem. Don't see across their forehead, hassle. Don't see across their forehead, oh, this is going to take a lot of time. No, see across their forehead, grace in Christ Jesus.

That will change your perspective on the people you serve. They are recipients of grace. Ah, okay. Of course I'm grateful for them. Of course I want to love them.

Of course I want to be a part of that grace unfolding in their lives. Thirdly, in this pastoring section, he identifies evidences of grace in their lives.

In chapter, or verses five to seven. That in every way you were enriched in him, in all speech, in all knowledge. Even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you.

So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift. As you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is one of the most remarkable aspects of this particular section. Again, prior to addressing problems, prior to addressing sins, prior to addressing shortcomings.

[8 : 53] And there are many problems, many sins, many shortcomings. He's going to address them all. But prior to all that, he identifies how God is at work in their midst. I'm sure you've been taught on this.

They have been enriched in Christ in all speech and all knowledge. And just remember, speech and knowledge are going to be key ideas in this letter. And key, this is what's amazing.

Speech and knowledge are going to be key ways that they are misunderstanding and distorting the gospel. But it's those very things that Paul sees as fruits of the gospel. Verse 6, even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you.

So I see God working among you, Corinthians. The gospel is bearing fruit in you.

And most remarkably, you are not lacking in any spiritual gift. It blows me away. He thanks them for the very things that are causing problems in this church.

[9 : 57] He thanks them for things that are being misused by this church. He thanks them for things that he's going to have to follow up and correct. My approach would have been just the opposite. I thank God for...

Well, I'm sure there's some things I thank God for. I thank God that you're still a Christian. I thank God that you love your wife still, sort of.

I would have said, no, I don't thank God for these things. I would not have mentioned. I would have very intentionally kept quiet about spiritual gifts.

In fact, if I were Paul, I'd be saying, you know what, spiritual gifts, we're continuationists, but not for the next six months. We're shutting them down. We're shutting them down. No more.

No, Paul says, I thank God for the... It's a powerful example. Paul relates to them. Think about the people in your church. Paul relates to them, not on the basis of their sin, but on the basis of God's grace in their lives.

[11:05] And his purposes for their lives. So how do we relate to the people we serve? Do we relate to them because of their performance?

Or do we relate to them because of God's grace to them? His love for them? His purposes for them? Is that what you notice first and most?

That God is at work in them? And if the Bible is true and if they are Christians, God is at work in them.

God's at work everywhere. He's at work in 10,000 ways that we're totally unaware of. So he is at work among your people.

But as a pastor, it falls to us to be alert, to be looking. And know this about the people that you serve. They are largely unaware that God is at work.

[12:14] He's got to know that about our people. Most Christians, I think it's true, most Christians exist wondering if God loves them.

Often feeling guilty before him. They think God is tolerating them, not affectionate toward them. And most people feel, most people are totally oblivious to all that God is doing in their lives. All the grace he's giving them.

All the ways he's using them. All the difference they're making in the church. The difference they're making in people's lives. Most people feel like they are totally, most people feel they're losers.

You know how I know that? Because I feel like I'm a loser. I'm walking around with a big L on my forehead.

[13:18] I'm just a loser. So people, they need us as pastors. It falls to us as pastors. One of the great privileges of being a pastor.

Think about it. This is part of your job description. How fun is this? One of our privileges, one of our job descriptions is pointing out to people where we see grace in their lives.

Where we see God at work in their lives. What a fun thing to do. That's not hard to do. And that is a culture that has been created across sovereign grace and I am so grateful.

That kind of alertness to God's work, that kind of conviction about God's work, that kind of communication about the ways we see God at work, that will create in your church an atmosphere of grace.

That's what you want. That's what we should create. It produces gratefulness in churches. It cultivates humility in churches. Because to be humble, you have to forget about yourself.

[14:26] To be humble, you have to pay attention. If I'm proud, I'm not paying attention to others. If I'm humble, I'm not thinking about myself. What do they think about me? How do I look? What do I do?

No, I'm not thinking about myself. I'm paying attention to others. I'm loving others. I'm serving others. I'm entering the building going, who can I reach out to? Who can I encourage?

Who can I serve? I, that's in my mind. Those three words, every single time. Who can I reach out to? Who can I encourage? Who can I serve? Tried to teach my kids that.

Okay, guys, we're going to church. We need to be looking. Who can we reach out to? Who can we encourage? Who can we serve? Because I don't want them coming in thinking about themselves. I want them coming in thinking about others.

We as pastors of all people should be coming in that way. You PC guys, you're all leaders in your own right. You're all serving in various ways.

[15:22] It's fine to encourage each other on a Sunday. It's fine to hang out on a Sunday. But, I mean, as pastors in our church, I'm not hanging out with the other pastors on a Sunday. They're my friends. I love them.

We're together a lot. No, Sunday's for the people. You know, I can talk to this guy later. I'm looking for other people that I can reach out to, encourage, and serve.

I guarantee you that's what that man over there does. But what a privilege. And we see Paul doing it here. He's the one who sets the example. Now, something else we see Paul doing, along with pointing out evidences of grace, letter D, he directs their attention to their ultimate hope, Jesus

Christ.

Now, this is, Paul is doing pastoring, and he's preparing for chapters 12 to 14. So, while he commends their present experience of gifts, you see what he does?

He sets that present experience in an eschatological framework. So, yes, you're not lacking in any spiritual gift.

[16:28] Then look what he says. As you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. You see what he's subtly doing?

You've got gifts. Good for you. But it's not the main thing. Something way better is coming. This is provisional.

No matter how gifted you are. No matter how rich you are in your gifts, you have yet to receive what the church ultimately longs for. The revelation of Jesus Christ.

His final coming. His final coming to triumph over all the powers of evil and death. The topic that is going to bring this letter to a close.

Chapter 15. You see what he's saying? Yeah, lots happening on a Sunday there. But you know what? That's not the ultimate, is it? Our real hope. We're waiting for Jesus Christ.

[17:27] In Paul's, the word he uses here is interesting. You're waiting for the day, I'm sorry, so that you're not lacking, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Paul's letters, he uses a number of terms to speak about the final return of Christ. He often uses the word, and you know some of these words, I'm sure. You know the word *parousia*?

Good. Which means what? Appearing? Appearing? Yes. Good. So, a common term.

He uses it twice in this particular letter. At the end of the letter, chapter 15, chapter 16. So, yeah. A coming or appearing, that's *parousia*. Sometimes he calls it an appearing, *epiphania*.

That's, do you remember Titus 2, 13? Waiting for the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

[18:37] That's *epiphania*, the appearing. Here, he uses revealing or revelation. The word, do you remember that word? Have you had that? *Apokalupsis*.

Apokalupsis, exactly. *Apokalupsis*. A disclosure or uncovering of something previously hidden.

You see the subtle implication that is there? The subtle implication is, at present, they don't fully perceive him as he really is.

You're waiting for the unveiling. You're waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ. It's brilliant. It's brilliant.

With all their gifting, with all their knowledge, with all their spiritual accomplishments, they only know him in part. Chapter 13. So, it's a humbling acknowledgement of our limitations as we wait for him.

[19:40] And then we'll know him fully. So, let's not be too puffed up about all we know. Right? About all we accomplish. We only know in part.

So, this should be humbling instruction for the Corinthians. And it's wise counsel for any church. Especially churches like, it appears, you are experiencing what John Owen called the test of prosperity.

When you're in a church and things are happening and people are getting saved and people are being disciplined. That's glorious. And that's what we pray for. Right? And that's what we labor for.

That's what we want. But this reminder, this is New Testament theology. It's a part of New Testament theology. Our present existence.

Yes, God is at work. In a thousand different ways. Yes, the gospel is going to go forward. Yes, Jesus is going to build his church. Absolutely. The gospel of the kingdom is going to be preached as a witness to all the nations.

[20:47] And then the end will come. Matthew 24, 14. Yes, yes, yes. However, our present existence is fundamentally a time of waiting.

A time to be sustained and strengthened by hope. Hope. Hope in Christ's final return and ultimate triumph.

Because we do not see all things under his feet yet, do we? So, Paul is...

Paul's model, not only in these verses, but throughout his letters, is very clear. We must never lose our cosmic frame of reference.

And historically, whenever the church has lost this frame of reference, error or compromise or unfaithfulness has been the result.

[21:50] Whether it be a rigid traditionalism of many liturgical churches.

This is what we do. We follow our order. We do this. We do this. We do this. We bow our heads at this time. We pray our prayers at this time. We do this. We do... And all of a sudden, life... The spiritual life just becomes what we do, how we do it, doing it right. We've lost the fact that we're waiting. Whether it be the social gospel of liberalism, it's all about we can bring about the kingdom now.

There's current forms of this, even among evangelicals. We are bringing the kingdom now. We're transforming culture as we engage the culture. And we're going to see all cultures brought under... We forget, no, no. This is... Let us labor, yes. But this is a time of waiting. Whether it be a subjective experientialism, pardon me, of parts of the charismatic movement or the health and wealth gospel. [22 : 54] Yes, it's all about now. I get the money now. I get blessing now. I get healed now. I have experiences in worship now. No, no. This is a time of waiting.

We taste, yes. But it's only a taste. Isn't that good? It humbles us. And it creates hope in us. And it keeps us from setting our hope fully on what we see now. And it keeps you from being discouraged when you don't see the kinds of things you'd like to see now. It reminds you when there's barren seasons. People are struggling. You're not seeing growth. You remember, well, that's the nature of life in this age.

We keep praying. We keep preaching. We keep serving. We keep trusting God. But my ultimate hope is not my personal success. My ultimate hope is Jesus Christ and him coming again. [23 : 56] We keep trusting those who do you do. So Paul is protecting the Corinthians from both discouragement, I think, and despair on the one hand.

Because when you do build that cosmic frame of reference, the stakes in our lives are raised. Our lives as individuals and churches are not insignificant. We've been swept up into a grand cosmic drama. The mission of the gospel is the most exciting thing ever. So yes, we're protected from encouragement. We're waiting on Jesus to return. And until then, we want to see Him proclaimed. So He protects them from discouragement. But He also protects them from pride and self-importance. Because the most important thing is not what we do. The most important thing is what God has done and what He will complete when He returns again.

[25 : 06] Finally, letter E. In this incredible paragraph, He directs their hope to the faithfulness of God. Look at how He ends. God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Here is their ultimate hope in life. Again, not their impressiveness, not their cultural fluency, not their giftedness, not their spiritual attainments. All of their hope is in the faithfulness of God, the character of God, the only solid basis for their hope.

And note what He says. Their whole existence is wrapped in God's faithfulness. Every word matters in God's Word. Look at what He says. God is faithful by whom you were called.

So God has been faithful in their past. How do they know God's been faithful? Because He called them. He called them.

Again, a cognate word with what? Paul was called and is possible. They have been called too. So they owe their past, their very salvation, their present fellowship with Jesus Christ, their existence as Christians, completely to God's sovereign mercy.

[26 : 33] And God will be faithful in the present and the future as well. God's faithfulness also reinforces the promise in verse 8.

Who will sustain you to the end in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ? God is faithful. What is going to cause you to persevere?

What is going to sustain you through whatever comes? God will sustain you because He is faithful. Again, Paul is relocating their hope from themselves, from their gifts, from their wisdom to the sustaining grace of God who has been faithful and who will be faithful until the end.

So this is a brilliant, a theologically rich, a pastorally wise introduction to this letter.

What have we seen? It's affectionate. Before any correction, Paul reinforces relationship. We talked about the importance of that for a pastor. It's God-centered. He's not flattering them.

[27 : 41] Aren't you clever? Aren't you great? No. He's not flattering them. He's thanking God for them. It's grace celebrating. Again, loaded with encouragement about God's work in them.

It's heart strengthening. So He's setting their hope on Jesus' return which protects them from setting their hope on this world. And it's Christ-exalting. Did you notice, I don't know if you've

noticed as we read through, in this letter where Paul will say that he preached only Christ and Him crucified?

Did you notice he references Christ ten times in the first nine verses? Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus to those sanctified in Christ Jesus together with those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace and peace from God and our Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God because of the grace that was given you in Christ Jesus. Verse 6, Even as testimony about Christ was confirmed among you.

We're waiting for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ who will sustain you guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful by whom you were called in the fellowship of Son Jesus Christ. Next verse, I appeal to you brothers by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[29 : 04] Do you see how Christocentric he is? He is, he, their worlds are revolving around their culture, around themselves, around their spiritual accomplishments.

God is, God is changing their galaxy so that their lives are beginning to revolve around Christ, Christ, Christ. Christ. The defining characteristic of the Christian and of the Christian life, it's not our status, it's not our works, it's not even our past or our future or our gifts or our potential.

It is, verse 9, the fellowship of his Son. The defining characteristic of the Christian life is our existence in Christ, our intimate communion with Christ, all of which drives and inspires us to live lives for the glory of Christ.

Christ. Now finally, this introduction is not only encouraging and God-centered and grace-celebrating, it's also theologically astute.

And just to underline what we said a moment ago, along with thanking God and commending them and pointing them to God, Paul is beginning to lay the theological groundwork for his pastoring, especially for his coming correction.

[30 : 55] So the foundation has been laid for the correction that's going to come. All right? Now, as you can see from that larger outline, you may want to have that handy.

It might be helpful to refer to. But we now come in verse 10 to the body of the letter with Paul's reference to the report from Chloe's people and his response to that report.

James. Yeah. It's a good question. Well, just remember the context. This is a church that Paul planted. This is a church that Paul carries a responsibility for.

Right? So it's not just another church down the street. And we spent some time at length before lunch talking about how he's preparing the way, reinforcing his relationship with them, making sure they know that he is grateful for them.

He views them fundamentally as a gift from God. He doesn't relate to them on the basis of their sin. He relates to them on who they are in Christ. He's alert to even the evidences of grace in their midst despite their sin.

[32 : 02] So he's doing all of that to prepare the groundwork for his ultimate pastoring of them. So it is a, contextually, it's a fairly limited application.

I think this is the way we relate to our people. Now, more broadly, though, I do think what you said is right, James. I mean, in any church where there are true believers, God is at work.

Now, his work may be resisted. His work may be distorted. There may be things in that church that we could never commend, would never want to be associated with.

In other words, we would want to be discerning of and even protect people from. But that's different. I'm a pastor of this church.

In other words, my church. I'm a pastor of my church. I'm a shepherd. I have a responsibility to protect those people. And so, that doesn't mean that I gloss over errors that could endanger them in other places.

[33 : 15] So, I don't feel the need at all to just sort of give a blanket commendation to any and all churches. This is not what this is teaching.

Paul is modeling how to care for a church that he's responsible for. And he's aware of. He knows people there. He knows people in the church.

He founded the church. He was there a year and a half with his church. And so, I think, I think, yes, we do want to be cautious not to be arrogant towards other churches.

But, we must remain discerning about other churches. Primarily, not to be critical, but to care for our people and to protect them.

And, I would say, ultimately, to protect the honor of Christ. Because some of those areas may be dishonoring Christ. And we can never rejoice in that.

[34 : 18] In fact, there's going to be places in this letter where Paul is going to say, I say this to your shame. Whoa. So, he gets, he gets very, he gets very real with them pretty soon.

Okay? That's a good question. All right. Well, let's, again, Paul launches the body of the letter by taking up this issue reported to him. Chloe, as I mentioned, is probably a wealthy woman in the church.

Her people, Chloe's people, are business agents, perhaps, representatives of some sort. Could be slaves, could be employees, could be partners that travel between Ephesus and Corinth.

Where, Paul is writing this from Ephesus. That Paul, it's interesting that Paul uses her name somewhat casually with no explanation. It implies that she and her associates belong to the church in Ephesus and have close contacts with those in Corinth.

Possible they're part of the Corinthian church. Whoever they are, Paul views their report as reliable and they bring a disturbing report which introduces perhaps the most famous problem in the Corinthian, in 1 Corinthians, the internal division over leaders.

[35 : 38] So what does Paul do? He begins with sort of a preemptive opening appeal before mentioning the problem. I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all agree and there be no divisions among you but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

So that's sort of his opening appeal, preemptive opening appeal before mentioning the problem. Even that is, I think, instructive. He doesn't say, I've heard all the, you've got all these problems. He goes, guys, I want you to be unified. Now, I hear there are problems that you're not. I think that's wise in what he does. So he wants them to, what does he say?

To agree. You know what that literally means, that phrase that's common in Paul? Well, it means to say the same thing.

I want you to say the same thing. To be united in your perspective and in your confession. So he wants there to be no divisions.

[36 : 48] He wants them to be united in the same mind and the same judgment. So those words together, the same mind and the same judgment, those, when you put those two words together, he's talking about an entire mindset and inclination, a Christ-centered perspective along with an other centered orientation.

That, that word there also, I won't flash the Greek up on the board, but the verb there, *katartidzo*, to be, that you be united, *katartidzo*, can also mean restored.

It's actually a surgical term for putting a broken bone back in place. So that's what Paul is after. He's after restoration, relational restoration, unity, that they think the same thing, they have the same perspective.

So that's what Paul is after. And everything that follows from chapter 1, verse 11, to chapter 4, verse 21, is basically an elaboration of this appeal.

All right? Now, let's look at the report. It's very, it's very elusive for us. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

[38 : 20] So his word is both intentional and pastorally illuminating. What did he say in verse 10? He exhorted them to have, to agree, and that there be no, what?

Someone said it. Divisions. That there be no schismata. You see what English word we get from that?

Schism. I want, I don't want there to be divisions. I don't want there to be schismata among you. So, that word means basically, it's not quite as strong as our English schism.

It means clicks. Sort of uncrystallized divisions. I don't want there to be these divisions. They haven't formed yet into these hardened warring parties yet, but I don't want there to be divisions. And then he mentions in verse 11, for, I don't want there to be schismata, for it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is what? that there are, that there is quarreling.

[39 : 34] Eridus is the word. Squabbles. Verbal antagonisms. So, there's real insight here. When quarrels and arguments linger, when erides, when quarrels and arguments linger and they are unaddressed, what can they lead to?

Schisms. Divisions. Arguments inevitably give birth to groups that form along the poles of the debate.

So, there is strong, implicit counsel here on the peculiar dangers of offenses and disunity. So, when you see squabbles, as a pastor, pay attention because they can become something much worse. And one of the most, I think, overlooked emphases in Paul's letters, you see it throughout his letters, I think it's the primary reason for the letter to the Philippians.

A good deal of Paul's exhortation in his letters involves unity, agreement. He'll say to the Philippians, think the same phrase, think the same thing.

[41 : 06] Romans 13, make every effort to be at peace. It's throughout Paul because he knows if you don't, this can happen.

And that's what's happened. That's what's happening in Corinth. Now, to be clear, it's always a truth-based unity. Paul never commends compromise for the sake of a superficial peace.

So we see him a number of times standing on principle. Remember Galatians? Wanted Titus to be circumcised? What's Paul saying?

No way. We're not given there. He would not take John Mark with him on his second missionary journey? Not going to do it. He confronts Peter to his face in Antioch, Galatians chapter 2.

So, Paul is a discerning man and he knows when the issue is the gospel, he's drawing a line. I'm not going to compromise. But Paul was no hothead.

[42 : 07] He was not a brawler. He was not contentious or argumentative. And we see also in his letters his long-suffering. He models and embodied what he said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2.

24. The Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome. But he should be what? It's a verse you should memorize.

2 Timothy 2. 24. But the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but be kind to all. Able to teach.

Patient when wrong. Gently correcting those who are in opposition. What a profile of a pastor. He's not a wimp.

He gently corrects. He corrects. But he does so gently. He does so humbly. So what Paul envisions and we see it here is for Christians to both be committed to truth and be committed to relationship.

[43 : 18] And that we be willing to do the hard work of processing the truth together to come to unity.

That's what I think is behind that phrase to say the same thing which he says a few times in his letters. We can translate it agree but the image to say the same thing and the implied process behind it means to think together under the authority of God's word until we together come under its authority until we together patiently humbly reach clarity until we arrive at a loving unity and agreement with each other.

That's how you say the same thing. You're not just parroting cliches but you come under the authority of God's word patiently working with each other until we receive clarity until we're both under God's word.

No one's winning an argument. We're all coming together under God's word until we reach a loving agreement and unity. That's how we say the same thing. So we reach the point where we both profess the same thing.

That's what Paul is appealing for here. Alright? Now much has been written about the nature of this division. It's actually one of the most contentious issues in the study of 1 Corinthians.

[44 : 47] Ironically there's not been a lot of unity around the cause of these divisions. But what's at stake here is the nature of the vision is not theological.

Meaning it's not that they're having different views on truths of God's word. But we could summarize it under a mundane term.

It's a form of hero worship. Essentially. In their pride people in the church were identifying with and aligning themselves around different leaders who they looked up to, who they wanted to be associated with.

So this produced in the church rivalries and factions and ugly divisions. Now recall our background. It's critical here. Set in the larger Greco-Roman context. In this setting, I alluded to this yesterday, but in this setting there was a very high value placed on the practice of rhetoric.

[45 : 57] Both wisdom in its Greek form, but especially the display of that wisdom through public rhetorical eloquence. And in this setting there were many itinerate, rival itinerate philosophers, sophists.

And this was part of an entire elitist educational system. The sophists were highly skilled speakers. They were impressive. They were well trained.

They were rhetorically skilled speakers who dominated public culture. They dominated politics. They dominated law. They dominated commerce.

They were the spin doctors of politics. Or the talking heads of media. So they would speak in the marketplace.

They would argue cases in the law courts. And they were skilled in self-promotion. When they came into a city, they would advertise their reputation.

[47 : 00] Some would even seek to be physically impressive. Do you know, we have evidence for this. They would shave their bodies. And use oil on their bodies.

Like, sounds like bodybuilders, right? I mean, that's the kind of thing that they would do. They're physically impressive. They're rhetorically impressive. And many would also form schools for training children.

And they would charge for their speaking and for their teaching. This is how they made money. And often the more expensive a man's schooling was, the more highly valued he was.

So parents would compete to have their children trained by the best. And so, you know, this was the track for social elevation. If you wanted your child to be, say, a senator, then you want him to have not only the best education, but the best resume, the best connections.

Oh, you studied under him. Oh, wow. We'll give you a job. I mean, this is the way the world still works a lot of times. And what really set a sophist apart was not so much his content.

[48 : 07] These guys weren't, don't think Plato or Aristotle. It was the skill of their public presentation. It was their speech. This was not about intellectual reasoning so much as it was about impressive oration.

So you got the picture? So it appears that the Corinthians are starting to mimic this elitist secular system, taking pride in the particular leaders who they felt were impressive, who they wanted to be identified with.

And so this produced rivalries as they rallied around their favorite teacher who they felt were superior. And again, the whole set of Roman values we mentioned earlier is at play.

If you identified with a leader of higher rank, that would confer upon you a higher status. And so we see the different factions that were set up. Verse 12.

What I mean is that each of you says, I follow Paul. I follow Apollos. I follow Cephas. I follow Christ. So some are following Paul, which is not surprising because he planted the church and spent 18 months there.

[49 : 20] Some said, I follow Apollos. Again, not surprising because Apollos followed Paul to Rome. Paul is going to say in chapter 3, I planted.

Apollos watered, right? We also know from Acts 18 that Apollos was a powerful speaker. He spoke boldly, Luke reports. He powerfully refuted the Jews in public.

Acts 18, 29. He's from Alexandria, too. One of the leading, behind Athens, the leading intellectual center of the world at the time.

Second only to Athens in intellectual sophistication. So this is a skilled guy and some are rallying to him.

Yes, he's my guy. Some even followed Peter. I follow Cephas. Paul, it's interesting. Paul actually mentions Peter's name four times in this letter, which seems to indicate that Peter visited Corinth and gained a bit of a following, it seems.

[50 : 35] The Christ group, or I follow Christ, is much more mysterious. Perhaps some people saw themselves as more spiritual than others and boasted in that.

You follow men, I follow Christ. It's one interpretation. It could be that there were Christians there who refused to line up on either side.

They didn't line up with the other leaders. They felt no need to or saw through it. And Paul just labels this another group as kind of a dig to the other ones. I'm not sure which is the case.

Either way, the church is divided. People's attention was being drawn away from Christ to human leaders. people were exalting themselves, looking down on others, and the gospel was in danger of being obscured.

The gospel was in danger of being lost. And that, for us, is what's most significant about this, thinking pastorally. While the issue itself doesn't appear to be theological or doctrinal in nature.

[51 : 44] In other words, the different groups weren't arguing doctrine. Paul says this, and I believe him, I disagree with what Apollo says on this matter. I like Peter's exegesis better.

That's not, it's not a doctrinal argument. Still, Paul deals with it in such a way to show that the division is a symptom of a much greater issue, which is theological.

Their very understanding of the gospel. In their divisions over particular leaders, the gospel itself was at stake. How so? Well, the Corinthians are beginning to see the gospel through the lens of this whole, sophisticated system.

With values of rhetoric, and eloquence, and self-display, and status, and rivalry. So, what's becoming more important to them? What's becoming more important to them is not the content of the gospel, or the effects of the gospel, or the implication of the gospel, but the form that the gospel took in the mouths of these different men.

The manner of its presentation. The eloquence of the preacher. The reputation of the pastor. And what that means for me, in terms of status.

[53 : 07] So, they begin to line themselves up with teachers of their choice, and take pride in this identification, seeking status through this identification.

As if Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas are political parties, are talking heads on the internet. It's ridiculous.

And Paul sees through the divisions on the surface, and he perceived what was underneath them. And in so doing, he perceived that ultimately, it was the gospel that was at stake.

And so, what we have from chapter 1, verse 18, through chapter 2, verse 16, Paul launches into an extended meditation on the cross.

As he puts it, the word of the cross, verse 18. And so, what Paul is after, and this is particularly important for us, is to show that pride and confidence in human wisdom, and status, and accomplishment, and importance is antithetical to the deepest logic of the gospel.

[54 : 30] This is going to show us, if you are like me, maybe you're not, maybe you're more sanctified. You probably are. You're more godly than I am. But if you're like me, at times, there can be cravings in your heart for significance.

You wouldn't feel that, would you? You want people to think you're gifted. You want people to think you're important. You want... Well, we see that.

It's like, oh, Lord, I'm sorry. It's pride. Well, this shows us, no, it's worse than pride. Your view of the gospel is being distorted. So don't minimize it by saying, oh, it's pride.

I'm sorry. I was proud. No. You're... Yeah, you were proud, but that very pride reveals you're losing the gospel. You're letting go of the gospel.

You're failing to think. You're not gospel-centered. I don't care what's on your church website. You're not gospel-centered because you're not living in light of the gospel that defines everything for us, including our identity.

[55 : 34] So that's what he's saying. Your pride, your self-importance, your emphasis on status and accomplishment, it's the very logic of the gospel.

It's antithetical to it. And so in this part of the letter, Paul is then going to highlight the opposition. So here's what's coming. The opposition between human wisdom and the cross. All right?

Are you with me? Now, verse 17, he introduces this. And I want us to pay attention to his wording. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.

And not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of his power.

So again, he's drawing attention away from himself. And just prior to this, I didn't baptize anyone. You know, well, maybe Stephanas or South Soul, but you know, I didn't come to baptize.

[56 : 35] I came to preach the gospel. So he's, he's, and we, I want to be this way. He's drawing attention to him away from himself and to anything that people might be attracted to in him, like being baptized by him.

And he's directing them away to the only thing that's significant about himself. He was called to preach the gospel. Not, as he says, as an impressive public speaker, not to get, not to get his YouTube followers up, not to get a, not to play a role in the conference circuit.

No. But to proclaim a particular message. You see what he says to preach the gospel, not with words of eloquent wisdom.

It's not about my presentation. And this is going to set up a critical contrast. I want us to see it. Verse 17, not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. You see what he's saying? The effectiveness of his preaching did not derive from his delivery. Or the world's idea of eloquence.

[57 : 57] And we still have similar ideas. He expressly rejects that. He rejected the techniques of rhetoric that impressed crowds, that drew attention to the speaker.

That kind of preaching might exalt him, but it completely drains the power of the gospel. You see what's at stake.

And in verse 18, he begins to explain how. How does presenting the gospel in terms of the standards of the culture, presenting it in a way that makes the speaker impressive, that wins people's applause, that caters to human pride and cravings, how does that undermine the gospel? That's what he's going to deal with. And you can see the fundamental contrast set forth in verses 17 to 18. Verse 17 shows what Paul rejected. Words of eloquent wisdom.

I think I put this on your outline. Did the font transfer? Sophia Lagu. Okay?

[59 : 07] I want you to follow me here. I know it's in the afternoon. Sophia Lagu. So, words of eloquent wisdom in the ESV is literally wisdom of word. Word.

Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of word. And that's what's called an attributive genitive or descriptive genitive.

In other words, wisdom characterized by word. Word. In other words, wisdom characterized by eloquence, by rhetoric, by impressive speech.

Okay? You following him? So, wisdom here basically means, and it doesn't mean, don't think Old Testament wisdom. It means persuasive human reasoning. What these guys were really skilled at was arguments.

They weren't philosophers, per se. They were, but they were really good at argumentation. And so, wisdom here means persuasive human reasoning, clever arguments that are then expressed in impressive speech.

[60 : 20] You see? So, the reference here is both to form and content. Clever arguments, worldly ideas, and the ability to express them in a skillful, impressive way.

He said, I didn't come to do that. That's what the sophists did. And this is what the Corinthians are being drawn to. And this is what Paul rejected. Now, look at the contrast.

The contrast comes in verse 18. Instead, what Paul brought was not wisdom of word, but word of the cross. That's on your outline?

Okay, you see it. That's an objective genitive. The word or the message about the cross. That proclaims the cross, the content of which is the cross.

Sure. So, you see the contrast? Not Sophia Lagu, but Lagos Staru.

[61 : 28] Not wisdom of word, but word of the cross. Not human wisdom characterized by Lagos, but a different kind of Lagos. A message. A word.

A message. A message that announces the cross. So, they came in Lagos, in eloquence. Paul says, no, I came with a Lagos.

A word. A message. You see? It's very subtle. Our English doesn't bring it out, but that's what's happening here. So, Paul sets up this argument then between their brand of wisdom and his preaching of the cross.

And the argument has three main points. I've laid these out for you. First of all, verses 18 to 25. The message itself stands in contradiction to human wisdom.

A crucified Messiah. We noted this a moment ago. Paul has already repeatedly spoken of Christ. He's mentioned grace.

[62 : 33] He's mentioned the gospel. But for the first time, in verse 17, he mentions the cross. He's not mentioned it yet. But now he does.

And he expands on the cross in verse 18. And we love the cross. We love to be cross-centered. But you have to realize when Paul says, no, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of his power.

The cross of Christ emptied of his power. What are you talking about? As soon as staru, as soon as cross comes out of his lips, a reader who's not a gospel-centered Christian just gasps.

By the very mention of the word cross, the symbol of the most shameful of deaths. In this setting, it's a vulgar word.

[63 : 38] As Cicero said, it is not to be uttered in polite company. Don't say it. It's a curse word. You say cross and people go, what are you talking about?

You don't say it because of all of the associations that emerge with it. Paul says, I don't want the cross to be emptied of its power.

You see the contradiction. Cross power? No. Cross is vulgar. Cross is disgusting. Cross is humiliating. No.

Cross is powerful. So he's already beginning to undercut the values of pride and self-exaltation that the Corinthians had absorbed from their culture.

But Paul does not avoid the cross. He doesn't. I love what he says here. We preach a resurrected Christ who can compete with all the other gods. Although the resurrection is crucial.

[64 : 40] He is going to say, he's going to deal with the resurrection later. No. He says, verse 23, we preach Christ crucified. He's not backing off from the cross.

He's not backing off from the shame. He's pressing this in their face. An utter kind. Christ crucified. It's a contradiction in terms. Christ crucified. What? Christ's don't get crucified. It's like saying dry water or clean dirt.

Messiah's don't get crucified. Yet, such a contradiction lies at the very heart of the gospel. And for us, it's not foolishness, is it?

No. It is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Now, back to 18. We'll take a break in just a moment. Back to 18. Note what he says about the gospel. Verse 18.

[65 : 39] For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. So the gospel is not, then, esoteric knowledge.

Some special knowledge for the few. The gospel is not slickly packaged philosophy. The gospel is not some self-serving scheme for better living or physical comfort or financial prosperity.

Like every ad I get on Instagram. It's an announcement of God's apocalyptic intervention into the world.

And when it comes, it divides humanity in two. The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. But to us, it's the power of God.

And that's what Jesus said he came to do, right? Didn't come to bring peace, but a sword. It's key to the theology of John, John's gospel. Jesus comes and he brings division.

[66 : 52] Remember in John 3.16, the lovely John 3.16. God loved the world so much. God loved the world in this way, that he sent his one and only son, that whosoever believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Wonderful, right? And where does John go next? But the world hated the light. Loved the darkness. So Jesus came, he brings division.

Well, that's what the gospel does. It divides humanity. And so all of the categories that divide the world now, rich and poor, Jew, Gentile, slave and free, what Paul is saying here, no, there's only two categories that matter.

There are those who are perishing and those who are being saved. Those are the two categories of humanity.

It's not a matter of, this isn't a matter of personal preference or worldly status. Eternal destinies are at stake. Let's follow Paul closely.

[67 : 53] It's not only a division of destinies. There's also here, I think I put this on your outline, there's an epistemological divide.

To some, it's utter folly. Nonsensical, even repulsive. It's an assault on the values of power and glory and pride so revered in Corinth.

You see where he's going. Their fixation on human wisdom reveals that they're being tempted by this category.

It reveals that they're still seeing the world from the perspective of the old, unredeemed age. By, man, I wish I could communicate this. By your aligning with these guys, the cross is being lost and you're starting to resemble this.

This cross is shameful. It's folly to those people. Is it folly to you? You're living as if it is because you want impressiveness and eloquence and pride.

[69 : 06] So they're slipping into this epistemological category of despising the cross. Despising what would humble us. What a helpful, convicting gauge for us.

Whenever our thinking and our affections begin to align with worldly values. As we were saying a moment ago, selfish ambition or a craving for others to honor me.

Or envy over someone else's gifts or ministry. All of which fall under the heading of worldly wisdom. It's irrefutable evidence that at that moment we've lost sight of the gospel.

The gospel has ceased to function for us. It's no longer informing us. It's no longer serving as the lens through which we view ourselves. Or others. Or life. Or ministry. Or ministry. Stakes are high, aren't they? But when is it functioning? Well, we see it. [70 : 16] It's when we see it for what it is. Verse 18b. For us who are being saved, it is the power of God. It is the effective action of God.

It is the exercise of God's authority. It is divine power in action to reveal God and to accomplish salvation. And to rescue sinners. And to defeat evil. And to transform lives. And this changes the way we see everything else as well. When we see the gospel clearly, we see everything else clearly. Play for you.