

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 34

August 18-24, 2014

Acts 18:1 – 19:20
1 Corinthians 1:1-2:16

Introduction to the Context Bible

Have you ever wished the Bible was easier to read through like an ordinary book – cover to cover? Because the Bible is a collection of 66 books, it makes reading like an ordinary book quite difficult. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that the later writers of the New Testament were often quoting or referencing passages in the Old Testament. In fact, much of the New Testament makes better sense only if one also considers the Old Testament passages that place the text into its scriptural context.

You are reading a running commentary to The Context Bible. This arrangement of Scripture seeks to overcome some of these difficulties. Using a core reading of John's gospel, the book of Acts, and the Revelation of John, the Context Bible arranges all the rest of Scripture into a contextual framework that supports the core reading. It is broken out into daily readings so that this program allows one to read the entire Bible in a year, but in a contextual format.

Here is the running commentary for week thirty-four, along with the readings for week thirty-five appended. Join in. It's never too late to read the Bible in context!

Week Thirty-Four Readings

<p>8/18 Paul in Corinth Acts 18:1-8:17</p> <p>Paul to Ephesus Acts 18:18-19:10</p> <p>The Sons of Sceva Acts 19:11-19:20</p> <p>Paul Writes the Corinthians - Church Divisions 1 Cor 1:1-1:17</p>	<p>8/19 Paul to Corinthians - Christ: God's Wisdom 1 Cor 1:18-1: 31</p> <p>Col 2:6-2:17 Lev 23:23-23:32 Luk 20:1-20:18 Eccles 8:14-8:17 Eccles 10 Prov 25:14; 27:1-27:2 Prov 8:1-8:12</p> <p>8/20 Paul to Corinthians - Christ Crucified 1 Cor 2:1-2:5</p> <p>Col 1:1-1:10 Luk 23</p> <p>8/21 Paul to Corinthians - The Spirit's Wisdom 1 Cor 2:6-2:16</p> <p>Job 32-33</p>	<p>8/22 Paul to Corinthians - The Spirit's Wisdom 1 Cor 2:6-2:16</p> <p>Job 35-37</p> <p>8/23 Paul to Corinthians - The Spirit's Wisdom 1 Cor 2:6-2:16</p> <p>Daniel 1:1-2:45 Prov 23:1-23:3</p> <p>8/24 Off</p>
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The Acts Narrative

We rejoin Luke’s narrative as Paul leaves Athens and walks to Corinth, a distance of about 50 miles. Our knowledge of Corinth at the time is fairly broad. A number of writers both before and after Paul give us insight into the town that Gordon Fee calls “the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world.”¹

One early writer with a wealth of insight into Corinth was the Greek traveler and writer Pausanias (120-180 A.D.). Book 2 of Pausanias’s *Description of Greece* centers on Corinth.² Pausanias gives a bit of history explaining that the ancient city of Corinth was destroyed by the Romans and then rebuilt by Julius Caesar. When Caesar rebuilt Corinth, he populated it with Roman colonists. Paul would have come into the picture roughly 100 years later. By that time, Corinth was already a prosperous and wealthy city.

The city’s wealth came from several places. First, Corinth held a unique place for trade and travel.



¹ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans 1987) at 3.

² Book 1 covered Attica, the area of Greece that included Athens. Pausanias writes of the Athenians having “altars of the gods named Unknown” (1.4). This echoes Paul’s comment to the Athenians in Acts 17:23, “I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’” See Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Book 2, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard 1918), translation by W.H.S. Jones.

Corinth was positioned with two harbors, one that faced Italy to the west and another facing Turkey to the East. The safest way to transit from Italy to Troas, Ephesus, or other key cities in the eastern Mediterranean was to sail into the Western harbor of Corinth (“Lechaeum”). At that point, the Corinthians had a kind of ancient railroad track made of logs that allowed the boats to be pulled across land the four and one-half miles to the Eastern harbor (“Cenchreae”). The logs were set out where a boat could be pulled onto the logs that would then roll under the boat. After the boat rolled off a set of logs, those logs would be carried to the front of the line to be used again in the movement of the boat. The sailing around the bottom of Greece was notoriously treacherous. Needless to say, this trafficking through Corinth brought a great deal of money into the city.

A second source of money came from a derivative source. Boat captains came into port with money to burn. Add to that the time it would take for their boats to be portaged four and one-half miles, and there was time for certain excursions by the captains. Strabo (64 B.C.–25 A.D.) wrote that, “Corinth is called ‘wealthy’ because of its commerce, since it is situated on the isthmus and is master of two harbors.”³ Strabo later adds that Corinth had a temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, lust, and beauty. This temple had many slaves and courtesans⁴ available for a price. Strabo wrote, “the ship-captains freely squandered their money” which gave birth to a first century proverb, “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.”⁵ (In light of these facts, we will not be shocked when we later read of the struggles Paul had trying to address the sexual problems of the Corinthians!)

A third source of money for Corinth came from the “Isthmian Games.” These were Olympic type games that occurred in Corinth every second year. The games drew great “crowds of people” and their money as well!⁶ They are also a reason Paul would speak to the Corinthians with sports analogies. Consider 1 Corinthians 9:24-9:27:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.

³ Strabo, *Geography* Book 8, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard 1927) translation by Horace Leonard Jones at 8.6. 20.

⁴ The Greek word Strabo uses is ἱεροδούλους (*hierodoulous*), which means literally a “sacred servant.” In every day parlance, this was a temple prostitute who sold sex for a price.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

These were analogies the Corinthians readily understood!

We do not know for certain the size of Corinth when Paul visited, but scholars estimate the population around 145,000.⁷ Into this city came Paul the missionary.

Luke tells us that after arriving, Paul found a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They had recently arrived at Corinth from Rome. They had left Rome because the Emperor Claudius had commanded Jews to leave. Luke does not give any more details, but secular history does. The Roman writer Suetonius (born ca. 70 A.D.) wrote a number of volumes on the lives of the Caesars. Book Five covers Claudius. As Suetonius recounts the facts, Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because “the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.”⁸

God’s hand providently placed Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth. Like Paul, they were tentmakers.⁹ Paul worked with them using his tent-making skills to make ends meet while teaching in the synagogues. Scholars point to the oral law at the time of Paul (which was later written down around 200 and forms the *Mishnah*) for the principle that one was to work as well as teach the Torah. To charge for teaching the Torah was to take one’s reward on earth.¹⁰ While Paul would take ministry help *after* people became Christians, he always seemed to have worked or used his own resources when teaching unbelievers.

Paul spent time in the synagogues reasoning with Jews and Greeks about Jesus as Messiah. Acts 18:4 in the English Version reads, “And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.” We should pause here and go into a bit of depth on the various early Greek copies we have of Acts. There are a number of different Greek manuscripts. While they differ only in minor ways, one of

⁷ John McRay, *Paul His Life and Teaching* (Baker Academic 2003) at 164.

⁸ See the Loeb Classical Library edition (Harvard 1997) translation by J.C. Rolfe at 25.4. Chrestus could possibly be related to another Jew other than Jesus Christ, but many, if not most, scholars consider this to be the Roman Jewish division over Christianity. We will consider this in greater depth when we look at Paul’s letter to the Roman church which came about to address the issues that arose when the Jews returned to Rome and tried to reintegrate within the church.

⁹ The Greek for “tentmakers” is σκηνοποιός (*skenopoios*), which was a leather worker. It would include working with and on tents, but also many other leather goods. See F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles, The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans 1951) at 343.

¹⁰ In the section of the Mishnah called “Abot,” we read, “Do not make [Torah teachings] a crown with which to glorify yourself or a spade with which to dig...Whoever derives worldly benefit from teachings of Torah takes his life out of this world.” (4.5.C.E).

the more significant differences is here in this verse. The various versions are grouped into “families” based upon which were used in various areas of the early church. The English Standard Version, and most modern versions, follows what scholars call the “neutral version” which was prevalent in many of the earliest manuscripts.¹¹

Another family of manuscripts that are also in use very early in the church are those called the “Western Texts,” after their greater usage in the Western part of the early church.¹² While most scholars do not use the Western Text where it conflicts with the Neutral text, there is a section added to this verse worthy of note. Bruce makes a good argument that these manuscripts are worthy of attention in deciding what Luke originally wrote, adding that even if this statement was not in Luke’s original, it seems nevertheless to be true! As Bruce says, “It is undoubtedly a correct statement of what Paul did.”¹³

So, what does the Western Version add? We will compare the two versions, highlighting some of the Western Version differences in Italics:

<u>Neutral Text</u>	<u>Western Text</u>
“And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.”	“And <i>entering into</i> the synagogue each Sabbath day, he held a discussion, <i>inserting the name of the Lord Jesus</i> , and persuaded <i>not only Jews but also</i> Greeks.”

In commenting on this textual change, Bruce Metzger notes the Western addition implies that in his expounding of the Old Testament scriptures, “Paul would ‘insert the name of the Lord Jesus’ where, according to Christian theology, it was appropriate.”¹⁴

Luke tells us that at some point in time, Timothy and Silas arrived in Corinth from Macedonia joining Paul in his efforts and freeing Paul up to preach more and make tents less! Some Jews were getting more and more vocal in their opposition to Paul

¹¹ For example, the “Neutral Text” is found in the Codexes Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus.

¹² The most notable Western Text is Codex Bezae.

¹³ Bruce, *Acts* at 343 quoting Lake and Cadbury.

¹⁴ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (United Bible Societies 1971) at 461.

causing Paul to shake out his garments and declare, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6).

Paul went next door to the house of Titius Justus to continue his teaching. Many scholars identify Titius Justus as the “Gaius” Paul writes of in Romans 16:23¹⁵ and 1 Corinthians 1:14-1:15. “Titius Justus” are second and third Roman names, while “Gaius” is a typical first name.¹⁶ His full name would have been Gaius Titius Justus. From the Corinthians passage, we learn that he was one of two that Paul himself baptized (“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that none of you may say that you were baptized in my name”). The second person Paul baptized was Crispus. We read of him in Acts 18 also.

Luke tells us that Crispus was the ruler of the synagogue and that he put his faith in Christ along with his family. They were among many in Corinth who heard Paul, believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8-18:9).

Paul had a vision from God one night where God told Paul not to fear, for in Corinth he would neither be attacked nor harmed. God was true to his word, and Paul stayed in Corinth for a full year and a half, longer than any city up to that point on his missionary trips.

While Paul was not attacked, there was an unusual flip of circumstances Luke gives us. Gallio became “proconsul of Achaia” and was approached by a group of Jews seeking to make a united attack on Paul. Before we get into the attack, we should note who was Gallio. When Luke notes Gallio was Proconsul of Achaia, we should think of him as Achaia’s ruling governor. He was high man for Rome and the Emperor in all of Achaia (Achaia was the ancient name for what we today consider Greece). We read a great deal of Gallio in contemporary writings of various sources.

Gallio’s brother was a philosopher named Seneca. His father was also named Seneca (called now “Seneca the Elder”). Bruce cites a Delphian inscription showing that Gallio was likely appointed to the Proconsul position in July 51. Seneca tells us that Gallio left his post because of a “fever” needing a cruise to help his healing.¹⁷ Dio

¹⁵ In the Romans passage Paul also mentions “Erastus, the city treasurer.” Archaeologists have discovered a paving stone dating from Paul’s era in Corinth that has an engraving that it was “laid by Erastus at his own expense as City Treasurer (*aedile*). See John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Baker 1991) at 331ff.

¹⁶ See the Paul lesson number 1 regarding Roman names. It can be downloaded from www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

¹⁷ Seneca letter 104.2, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard 1925) translated by Richard Gummere.

Cassius, a Roman writer of history born around 150 A.D. would offer comment on Gallio's penchant for witty one-liners.¹⁸

As the Jews try to get Paul in trouble with Gallio, they bring a charge that Paul is "persuading people to worship God contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13). Roman law allowed certain religions to exist, but others were deemed illegal ("*religio illicita*"). It seems the Jews were trying to persuade Gallio that Paul's teaching was of an unrecognized faith.

Paul, of course, would have seen his teaching as the fruition and fulfillment of Judaism. Judaism was an accepted Roman religion, so it is not entirely surprising that Gallio made quick disposal of the complaining Jews. Gallio explained:

"If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things" (Acts 18:14-18:15).

So, Gallio sent them all from his presence and Paul left. Meanwhile, certain Roman soldiers grabbed the chief complaining Jew (Sosthenes), ruler of the synagogue (Crispus being replaced after coming to faith) and beat him! Instead of Sosthenes getting Paul in trouble, Sosthenes¹⁹ himself took a beating.

Paul spent 18 months (a long time for Paul) in Corinth. That time gave Paul opportunity to make lasting friendships with co-workers Priscilla and Aquila. Paul also got to know the Corinthian church intimately, something we will see more fully as we consider the follow-up letters between Paul and the Corinthians.

Luke tells us that Paul left Corinth from Cenchræ, which was the Eastern port facing modern Turkey. Luke adds that at Cenchræ, Paul cut his hair as part of a vow before sailing.²⁰ Paul was headed back to Syria, but the boat made port first at Ephesus.

¹⁸ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* Book 61 at 35.3-4, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard 1925) translated by Earnest Cary.

¹⁹ Paul will later write to these Corinthians and reference "our brother Sosthenes" in 1 Corinthians 1:1. If it is the same Sosthenes, then he subsequently came to faith as well!

²⁰ Most scholars believe that Paul was fulfilling a vow he had made that as God protected him in Corinth, he would cut his hair. See, F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans 1990) at 398. McRay suggests that Paul had taken a "private" Nazirite vow of thanksgiving for the fulfillment of the promised protection that had come to Paul in a vision. Paul would then offer his cut hair under the Nazirite vow at the temple in Jerusalem. John McRay, *Paul: His Life and Teaching* (Baker Academic 2003) at 174-6. Ramsay suggests the vow was connected "with safe embarkation from Corinth." William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Baker 1949) at 263.

Priscilla and Aquila sailed with Paul as far as Ephesus, and they chose to stay there rather than go on with Paul.



Something very, very rare happened while Paul was in Ephesus. Paul left the boat long enough to go into the city and attend synagogue services. Paul took that opportunity to reason with the Jews. Those Jews asked Paul to stay longer to discuss things with them more. Paul actually said, “No,” adding that he would return to them if God so willed (Acts 18:20-18:21). This was indeed rare! Paul turning away an opportunity to stay and teach about Jesus! What was it driving Paul to leave so quickly?

Ramsay provides a good explanation for the timing of Paul’s trip. Ramsay explains that Paul was hustling back to Jerusalem for the Passover feast in 53 A.D. If we accept Ramsey’s analysis, then we should note the Passover was March 22 that year. Since navigation in the Mediterranean began as a general rule on March 5 each year (winter weather made such travel unusually dangerous), every day counted as Paul strove to return.²¹

Acts 18:22 tells us that Paul finally landed at Caesarea, near Jerusalem, “went up and greeted the church” (which is language used for going “up” to Jerusalem), then “went

²¹ Ramsay at 263-264.

down” to his home church back at Antioch. After spending some time in Antioch, Paul left on his third missionary journey.

Paul’s third journey took him back through the Galatian churches for a fourth visit. While Luke gives us no details, it is clear Paul had a Pastor’s heart toward those Christians he had seen come into the church. Paul spent that time “strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23).

Ephesus

Paul’s third journey into modern Turkey gave Paul a chance to return to Ephesus as promised. Luke tells us some background information on some important events that had occurred in Ephesus since Paul had last been there. A Jewish fellow from Alexandria, Egypt had come. This man was both eloquent and strong in his command of scripture. His name? Apollos!

Apollos knew about Jesus, but in a rudimentary way. For example, Apollos understood the baptism taught by John the Baptist, but never had been taught about the Christian baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. It is as if Apollos had gained knowledge of Jesus from the early ministry years, but no more. We can easily imagine Apollos making a trek from Alexandria to Jerusalem. Apollos could have then come under the teaching of John the Baptist, receiving his baptism. Apollos also understood that John the Baptist had directed his followers to follow Jesus. Again, the contact between Alexandria and Jerusalem was close enough that Apollos could have easily kept up with the teachings of Jesus. But somehow, Apollos failed to grasp the full import of the death and resurrection, at least as far as baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Apollos was teaching in the synagogue at Ephesus, as he best understood, when Priscilla and Aquila heard him. Priscilla and Aquila pulled Apollos aside and explained more fully “the way of God.” Apollos took to it immediately and before long left Ephesus and went over to Corinth and Achaia to strengthen the church and aid in disputes with the Jews over scripture and Christ.

In light of those developments, it is not surprising that as Paul was heading into Ephesus, he found some disciples that, while following Jesus, understood only the baptism of John. These were folks who had not even heard of the Holy Spirit, much less received it! Paul explained that John’s baptism was one that prophesied the coming of Jesus, but the believer’s baptism was one that was into Christ himself. Hearing this message, these people were baptized into Jesus’ name. Paul laid hands on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying as the Spirit came on them.

Some might wonder how these people had not already been taught more accurately; after all, Priscilla and Aquila were there! Our answer lies in part in understanding

Ephesus a bit more fully. Unlike many places Paul had been as he went through Galatia, Ephesus was not a small town. Scholars place the population of Ephesus at this time between 200,000 and 250,000.²² Strabo (c. 64 B.C. – c. 25 A.D.) called it, “the largest emporium in Asia this side the Taurus [mountains].”²³ Having people with various stages of understanding, especially with Apollos having taught John’s baptism for some time, makes complete sense.

Paul then fulfilled his promise returning to the synagogue in Ephesus. Paul spoke boldly about Jesus, persuading and explaining about God’s kingdom. After three months teaching, some were stubbornly refusing to put their faith and belief in Jesus as Messiah, so Paul left the synagogue and moved his teaching to the “hall of Tyranus.”

We get an insight into Paul’s teaching at Tyranus’s hall through the Western text (see section on Corinth above), which tells us Paul argued/taught there “from the fifth hour to the tenth.” For clock purposes, the day began at 6 a.m., so the “fifth to the tenth” hours would mean roughly from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. This was the time when businesses (including the school of Tyranus) would be shut down for lunch and afternoon rest. Following this schedule gave Paul a chance to work during normal working hours. Then when folks were eating and resting, Paul could take that time to teach.

For two solid years, Paul used this time and place to teach of Jesus. Ephesus made a splendid location for Paul to do so! Ephesus was not only an important seaport, but it was also strategically located for trade and travel by land. Trebilco explains that Ephesus had roads heading north and south as well as two major highways heading east.²⁴ The port was to the west, and had direct shipping routes from Greece, Macedonia, Syria, Palestine, and even Egypt. Travelers from all over the Mediterranean world would make their way to Ephesus. In addition to standard travelers, Ephesus was home to a “courier school.” This was a school that taught and trained people how to be messengers or couriers. These people were trained to take letters and messages and deliver them where sent.²⁵ We have no way of knowing how God might have used people trained there to send and secure many of the letters we

²² *The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting*, editors David Gill and Conrad Gempf, chapter by Paul Trebilco, “Asia” (Wipf and Stock Publishers 2000) at 307.

²³ Strabo, *Geography* 14.1.24, Loeb Classical Library translation by Horace Jones.

²⁴ In the book of Revelation, we read Jesus instructing John to write to seven churches of Asia. The first letter is to the church at Ephesus, the center of communication. From there, the churches are listed as Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These churches follow the order of road starting in Ephesus winding in a “geographical semicircle...on what must have functioned as an ancient postal route.” John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Baker 1991) at 243.

²⁵ Trebilco at 310-311.

now have in our Bibles. We do know that as a result of Paul's time in Ephesus, "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10).²⁶

Ephesus was a magical place, in more ways than one! Magic itself had a home in Ephesus. There was a term used in the day, Ἐφέσια γράμματα (*Ephesia grammata*) meaning, "letters or writings of Ephesus."²⁷ These were words, spells, and incantations of Ephesus that allegedly contained powers over the spiritual realm. In addition to magical spells, we have many inscriptions showing that the Ephesians sought out healing for medical maladies from various gods worshipped there.²⁸

Paul came into the Ephesian magic scene bringing not only the truth of God, but the power of God as well. God worked "extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul" (Acts 19:11). In fact, not only through Paul, but also through Paul's face, cloths, and aprons, the sick were healed and demons exorcised.

Some itinerant Jewish exorcists thought they had found some new magic words that would give them a similar power! Thinking Jesus nothing more than magic, they sought to exorcise some evil spirits. These men (they were "seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva") tried to control a spirit demonizing a man saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims" (Acts 19:13). The spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15) The spirit then used the man to overpower the exorcists, leaving them naked and wounded as they fled the house!

When word of this got out, those who heard the news held the name of Jesus in greater awe and fear than before. Jesus was praised, and those believers that had kept books of magic brought those out and burned them publicly!

It was from Ephesus that Paul likely wrote the letter we call 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians

Church Divisions (1 Corinthians 1:1-1:17)

Paul writes to the church, not simply as its "founder" or as its mentor. Paul writes under his authority as an apostle, called to such position by the very will of God. Paul includes Sosthenes in his letter. As we noted before, Paul addresses the church with its

²⁶ Trebilco writes, "Paul's message would quickly be spread through the province, through the agency of people who had come to Ephesus for any number of reasons, had become Christians, and then returned to their homes, but also because *people would be used to hearing news from Ephesus.*" (Emphasis added.) *Ibid.*

²⁷ See Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* 7.5.

²⁸ Trebilco at 312-313.

accolades that came from its role as the body of Christ, “sanctified,” “called,” and “saints.” The Corinthians had not earned these titles; they were given by God’s grace.

Paul thanks God for the grace given to the Corinthians in Christ. It is the grace that enriched their speech, their knowledge, and their lives through spiritual gifts. This grace was from the faithful God who would sustain the Corinthians holding them guiltless in judgment day. This same God also called the church into the common bond they shared in Jesus.

While the Corinthians were called to a common fellowship, they were not living in it! Paul appeals to them to drop their petty groups where they label themselves as “following Paul,” or “Peter,” or “Apollos.” They should follow Christ! That was the power of Paul’s message. Who baptized them, or who was their core leader was not the issue. The issue was the cross of Christ that gave meaning to baptism and teaching!

Christ: God’s Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18-1:31; Colossians 2:6-2:17; Leviticus 23:23-23:32; Luke 20:1-20:18; Ecclesiastes 8:14-8:17; Ecclesiastes 10; Proverbs 25:14; 27:1-27:2; 8:1-8:12)

The cross might seem silly to the unsaved, but it is the very means where God forgives sin and saves those who believe. Paul explained to the Colossians that the truth of Christ is opposed to certain philosophies and deceits of human tradition (Col 2:6-2:9). God worked through Jesus to effectuate forgiveness for all comers, as Christ paid a due and just penalty owed by sinful people (Col 2:10-2:14). The need to atone for sin was set forward formally in the Law in the ceremony of the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:23-23:32). But the Day of Atonement, with its sacrifice of animal blood, did nothing in and of itself to atone for sin. It was a foreshadowing.

This was the point of Jesus’s teaching in Luke 20. The very means of people’s salvation would be rejected by God’s “people” sending him to the death that saved them. Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” then adding from Isaiah 8:14-8:15,

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. NOTE – not the verses in ESV

Paul seizes upon the same idea noting the cross to be a “stumbling block” to the Jews.

While Jews trip over the gospel and Greeks think it silly, it is God’s wisdom that will bring shame to those who do not learn it in this world.

It is just like God to use something that seems weak and foolish to save the lost. It certainly keeps people from ever claiming that they saved themselves! While the Corinthians are quarreling over who was saved or better taught by Paul, or Apollos, or

Peter, or anyone else, they should remember that God brings the things that are taught. Similarly it is God who removed all boasting from man, and made Jesus our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. That is Paul's boast!

"Wisdom" is an important Biblical word and concept. The writer of Ecclesiastes studied to understand wisdom. Much of life made no sense. Wicked people often prosper while righteous people suffer (Eccles 8:14). Before the cross of Christ, the preacher of Ecclesiastes could not see God's wisdom or work (Eccles 8:16-8:17). A single dead fly can change the smell of perfume to a stench (Eccles 10:1). Sometimes folly is rewarded while wisdom is subjected to humiliation. This can even come about seemingly by "accident." One can fall in a hole he digs or be bitten by a snake (Eccles 10:8-10:11).

Yet there was some measure of direction and wisdom, rooted in whether one followed God. We read of the power of wisdom in daily life in Proverbs 8:1-8:12. Wisdom trumps silver and gold, is more valuable than jewels. God's wisdom is worth all man might have in order to obtain it. That is the power of God's wisdom in Christ. Something that makes sense of life (missing by the writer of Ecclesiastes), and something worth all one could have in return.

Christ Crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-2:5; Colossians 1:1-1:10; Luke 23) and The Spirit's Wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:6-2:16; Job 32-33, 35-37; Daniel 1:1-2:45; Proverbs 23:1-23:3)

Knowing God's wisdom was displayed in the Christ crucified is why Paul never worried about trying to show off his eloquence. Paul came in weakness, fear and trembling, armed only with a message of a crucified Savior. Paul's power was not the turn of a phrase, but the very Spirit of God.

Now, all this is not to say that Paul, or God's message, is that of a simpleton. In fact, there is wisdom behind what God has done and Paul has preached that many, if not most, never can grasp. There is a great depth to this that proceeds from the very depths of God. It is not something most people grasp because it takes the Spirit of God to grasp it. Most people live by the flesh and never grasp the spiritual truths of the age-old secret wisdom of God redeeming the world in Christ.

Paul used this same terminology and idea in his prayer life, as we see in Colossians 1:1-1:10. Paul prayed for those believers to be filled "with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." This filling would then move the believers to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

For Paul, the more we learn of God, the more we learn of his wisdom, i.e., his work in Christ, the more we change to become like him!

The root is the historical death of Christ as atonement for sin, as we read in Luke 23. This was the death where Jesus prayed not only for those who sent him to the cross, but for all whose sin was compelling his sacrifice,

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Luk 23:34).

In the midst of Job's story, there are multiple friends who think they have cornered the market on God's wisdom, able to instruct Job in the errors of his ways. Those friends are readily dismissed. However, toward the end of the book, a friend named Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite enters the picture. Elihu is angry at the others. He is angry at Job for justifying himself before God. He is angry at Job's friends for failing to properly explain the situation. With a dose of humility, Elihu then enters the fray.

Elihu points out that true wisdom comes from God, not from age (Job 32:6-32:14). That true wisdom knows that before God, people can make no demands (Job 33:6). Before God, people cannot truly be justified on their own (Job 33:9-33:12). Before God, people know nothing and have no room to challenge him (Job 33:13-33:18). If no one understands this, their talk is empty (Job 35:16). In Job 36, Elihu continues pointing out God's greatness in knowledge and God's focus on this world and the people in it. God cares about how we live and our attitudes towards him and ourselves. We should behold God as marvelous and wonderful, far beyond our comprehension (Job 37:5).

This is wisdom from Elihu, and it fits well in hand with the wisdom we read of from Daniel. In Daniel 1 and 2, we see Daniel's life as one standing against the rules of the world and the wisdom of the world. Daniel understood that wisdom proceeded from God, not the philosophies or mind of a person. It's not what makes sense to people that counts. It is what God is doing!

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter (Dan 2:20-2:23).

Paul proclaimed the same wisdom, but with the revelation of Christ crucified.. Christ sacrificed for sin was fully unexpected and uncomprehended by the people. As Paul will continue to explain in the coming Corinthian verses, it takes the Spirit of God to understand what God is about.

Questions for Discussion

Consider building questions around these passages:

1. How has God used the events in your daily life to further his kingdom? How might he use them if you work towards that result?
2. What does it mean to us today to “boast” in the cross of Christ as God’s wisdom?
3. In what ways does the wisdom of God conflict with the philosophies of our age and culture? What can we do to project God’s wisdom?

Week Thirty-Five Readings

<p style="text-align: center;">8/25 Paul to Corinthians - The Spirit’s Wisdom 1 Cor 2:6-2:16</p> <p>Dan 5-6 Prov 19:8 Prov 20:24, 27</p> <p style="text-align: center;">8/26 Paul to Corinthians - Divisions at Church 1 Cor 3</p> <p>1 Kgs 12:1-12:15 Pov 21:24 1 Kgs 12:16-13:34 Prov 30:21-30:23</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">8/27 Paul to Corinthians - Divisions at Church 1 Cor 3</p> <p>1 Kgs 14-15</p> <p style="text-align: center;">8/28 Paul to Corinthians - Divisions at Church 1 Cor 3</p> <p>2 Chron 10-13 Prov 17:19</p> <p style="text-align: center;">8/29 Paul to Corinthians - The Apostles’ Ministry 1 Cor 4</p> <p>Mrk 10:13-10:16 Phil 2:12-2:18 2 Jn 3 Jn</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">8/30 Paul to Corinthians Sexual Morality 1 Cor 5</p> <p>Prov 5:15-5:23 Prov 6:20-6:35 Prov 10:17 Prov 11:22 Prov 30:20 Prov 10:13</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Paul to Corinthians - Lawsuits Among Believers 1 Cor 6:1-6:11</p> <p>Luk 12:57:12:-59 Ex 18 Prov 25:8-25:10</p> <p style="text-align: center;">8/31 Off</p>
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