To the Church

Week One

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

**Scriptural Interpretation Basics:**

Scriptural interpretation is not about trying to discover something new that no one has thought of before - in fact that is dangerous territory

The goal is to unpack ‘the plain meaning’

Scriptural interpretation strikes a balance between eternal relevance and historical context.

To understand Scripture we always have to take into account a few factors:

1. Literary form - poetry, wisdom, historical, open letters (epistles) and ‘real letters’ (to one place regarding a specific issue) (this is a letter)
2. Intended audience (their culture, their place in history)
   1. We first have to understand what God was **saying to them back there**
      1. Occasion and purpose
      2. Text message that says “How did the Colts do?” or if my family back home sees one of you text me and say “It’s the greve again”
   2. We then have to deduce what it is God is **saying to us now**
      1. *2 Timothy 3:16-17 - All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ***17*** *so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*
      2. Situtations just for intended audience vs situations in our lives with no apparent instruction
      3. In this case we have to apply interpretation skills to find the Biblical principles that God intended to be lasting
      4. Pay attention when something repeats or has a recurring theme
      5. As we read through this book, we can see how Paul applies the gospel to everyday situations.
         1. **The power and truth of the gospel is found in its ability to inform every aspect of our lives**
         2. Paul illustrates this beautifully and models how we can do this in our own lives

What do we know about Corinth?

* It was a port city and therefore grew quickly - lots of wealth - young city
* It was diverse
* Artistic and religious center
* It valued sexual freedom
* It deeply valued Roman and Greek philosophy and study

A couple of these cultural values were strongly reflected in the church and affect how we read Paul’s letter:

* Diverse nationalities (names Paul mentions come from Jewish/Roman/Greek/Latin backgrounds)
* Wealthy and poor and a large social divide between them
* High value of education/philosophy
  + They thought themselves so advanced that they thought Paul had nothing to teach them

Paul brings this up in the intro to his letter -

*1 Corinthians 1:1-3*

*Paul, \*called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God\*, and our brother Sosthenes,*

\*If God has called you and equipped you, you need to lean into that calling\****2*** *To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:****3*** *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

* First Paul reminds the people who he is, and then he reminds the people who they are
  + Paul reminds them they are not alone
* Paul blesses them with grace and peace (standard for Paul)
* This was the standard opening for a letter - it’s a clue as to the literary form
* Paul goes on in the next section to offer thanksgiving for them - he calls out what they’re doing right - is specific in his affirmation

Paul goes on to help us understand why he was writing this letter to them. (The occasion)

*V 11 -* ***My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.*** *What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”;another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”*

* Paul: Let’s talk openly about these things

Paul immediately in the first couple of paragraphs points out two major issues that will be recurring themes in 1 Corinthians:

1. Division
   1. This is the first thing Paul addresses - the church is not unified
   2. He calls out some of their issues, which is that they were arguing over who was their spiritual leader
   3. Paul goes on to correct this, but we will see this theme again as we explore this letter from Paul
2. Self-sufficient wisdom
   1. Remember the Corinthian people loved philosophy and debates and education
   2. Word had gotten out to Paul that these people considered themselves so smart that they had nothing more to learn about God
   3. Some of the people in the church considered themselves to have obtained enlightenment because they had their secular education and the Holy Spirit - they were done learning
   4. Paul comes in from the beginning and begins to correct this

Paul - (v 17) I don’t want you to elevate me to the same level as Christ! I don’t even care if I baptize you, but I have to make you aware of the power of the gospel!

(Gospel = good news = Jesus)

*V 18 - For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*

* Two groups: now ‘those who are perishing’ and ‘those who are being saved’
* The cross marks a new beginning where God makes good on his promise to restore the world to how it should be - and those who rely on human power and strength will perish with the world Christ overcame
* Those of **us** who are being saved are those who recognize our own weakness and inability to make it without God

*V 19-20 -* *For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”[Isaiah 29:14]*

***20*** *Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?*

*V. 21 - For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.*

* God’s plan was that we couldn’t make it on our own - our own effort and logic is not enough to save us - we can’t know God through our own wisdom
* God was PLEASED to bring us into relationship with himself
  + Through the foolishness of what was preached, God’s purpose was to save us
  + Salvation only comes through the cross
  + *“The gods of the wise are seldom gracious to the undeserving, and they tend to make considerable demands on the ability of people to understand them; hence they become gods only for the elite and deserving.” - Gordon Fee*

*V 22 - 24 -*

*Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,* ***23*** *but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,* ***24*** *but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

V 22 - basic idolatries of humans - insisting that God conform to our own idea of power

* The Jewish people kept demanding of Jesus that he ‘show us a sign’
* We still fall into this - demanding that God either do what we say, or speak to us in the way we decide.
* We still demand that God makes sense - BUT >

*V 23 - But we preach Christ crucified - a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles*

* God responded to human power with weakness and humility
* Christ crucified is a contradiction - if he is Christ he can’t have been defeated, and if he was crucified, he can’t have been the Messiah
  + Jews believed God was all powerful and prioritized the political victory of HIS people - the Israelites or Jewish nation. To have their supposed savior crucified didn’t work with who they believed God to be
* Maybe the response of the Gentiles reminds you of conversations you’ve had about your beliefs - what is the logic of a God who went and got himself killed? It is foolishness
* Remember in v 18 Paul creates a new grouping - instead of Jews and Gentiles or Jews and Greeks, there are now those who believe and those who are perishing
* In both groups there are those who are called by God and those who are redeemed by God - the ethnic divide is no longer the game-changer - it’s those who believe or those who don’t believe
* **To those who are called, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God**
  + It doesn’t matter who you were born as, (Jew/Greek; Christian household/non; wealth/poverty) you have been called out and called up and now you have access to the power and wisdom of God as a follower of Jesus
  + **Romans 1:16 - Christ is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe**
  + Thus it isn’t my qualifications that lead me to salvation - it is my acceptance of God’s wisdom and my leaning into His pursuit of me
  + The message of the cross is foolish but the message of the cross is that power is not obtained through our own efforts or wisdom, but only through the power of God
  + Christ gave himself as a sacrifice, bearing all our sins and shame, and was handed over to death
  + It was the power of God that raised Christ from the dead and defeated death for us, and it is that same power that lives in us and drives us to give our lives for him
  + We follow a King who served the poor and the broken, we serve a King that came down to our level and came to dirt and grit so that he could heal us and set us free
  + That is what God wants for you - the foolishness of the cross is that the God of the universe would become flesh and bone just so He could know you and heal you and give you hope that your life and your purpose extend beyond the days you will breathe air on this earth

*V 25 - “For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”*

* Human wisdom could never have come up with what God planned, but even when God doesn’t seem to make sense we can trust that his purposes are eternal
* This foolishness of God did what no man could do - it brought us into right standing with God and allowed us to boldly approach the throne of God
* By the cross, God overpowered his enemies, not with violence but with lavish grace and forgiveness

God gives us a choice - Paul outlines it in verse 18 - those who are perishing rely on themselves, but those who are saved rely on the power of God

* Joshua’s story about his co-workers - “Christians are weak - they think they need God.” Joshua said, “I know I am weak, and my strength comes from God.”
* Following Christ is irreconcilable with pride. The cross itself was humility and a giving up of will in order to follow God’s purposes
* We can trust God and be saved by trusting his plans, or we can trust our own wisdom and perish
* Weakness in God is scandalous to those who think themselves righteous with no need of forgiveness, but to those who recognize themselves as needing mercy it is freedom