BUILT DIFFERENT

LESSON TWO

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY NOTES

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17

In the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, Thomas Schreiner looks at the divisions impacting the church at Corinth:

10–11 The body of the letter begins with an exhortation (*I appeal, parakalo*), which is a term Paul regularly uses to exhort his readers. The appeal is given *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. 1:2), which reminds the readers that Paul's words are not merely his private opinion, and that Paul's exhortations formulate the consequences of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Three synonymous phrases describe the nature of the appeal. The Corinthians are plagued by divisions, and Paul wants them to be united and harmonious.

Twice in these verses Paul uses kinship language (*brothers and sisters*) to denote his affection and love for the Corinthians. He discloses that he heard about the divisions and strife from those associated with Chloe, which may designate 'business associates, business agents, or slaves acting on her behalf'. We wish we had more details about how Paul received the report, but nothing more is said about it. Perhaps Chloe's people travelled from Corinth to Ephesus and communicated with Paul. It is also possible that Stephanas and friends (16:17) were the means by which the information that came from Chloe was communicated to Paul.

12 Now we see the nature of the divisions. The Corinthians were picking sides and choosing different ministers. Some sided with Paul, others with Apollos and still others with Peter. As the discussion on divisions unfolds, the focus shifts to Paul and Apollos (3:4, 5, 6, 22; 4:6), probably because most were divided over them. Apollos was known for his eloquent and powerful preaching, and we know that he ministered in Corinth (Acts 18:24–19:1). We cannot be certain that Peter (we see here his Aramaic name, Cephas) ever ministered in Corinth, though he probably did, for otherwise it is hard to imagine how believers could be divided over him. Peter's name surfaces a number of times in the letter (3:22; 9:5; 15:5) and he is mentioned again in the course of the discussion about strife in the church (3:22). The most difficult thing to explain is the reference to Christ. Grammatically, it seems as if the Christ party is another party, but it is difficult to know what to make of a Christ party since following Christ is obviously a good thing. Interpreters explain the reference to Christ in a number of different ways, some seeing an actual Christ party. Perhaps the best solution understands Paul to be saying the following: You all follow human leaders but I, Paul, follow Christ—thus showing that the partisan quarrelling over leaders is beneath them as Christians.

In New Testament scholarship, following the train of the influential F. C. Baur, the division over Paul and Peter has been used in support of the notion that there was a Pauline and Petrine Christianity in the early church. This schema has been used as a lens for interpreting the New Testament by many in the history of interpretation. We shall see as we proceed, however, that there is no basis for such a reading in 1 Corinthians. The divisions were entirely the fault of the Corinthians, and Paul did not find fault with the theology of Peter or with Apollos. In fact, Paul specifically says that Peter and he proclaim the same gospel (15:11). And if Apollos were part of the problem, Paul would scarcely encourage him to visit Corinth (16:12). The divisions, as will be explained shortly, must be attributed not to contrary theologies but to the pride of the Corinthians and to their entrancement with the rhetorical ability of certain speakers.

13 The incongruity of divisions centring on the different ministers is featured in this verse. The first phrase *Is Christ divided*? could be a question or a statement in the Greek. The niv, following the tradition in English translations, takes it as a question. Even if we have a statement, the meaning would not differ dramatically, since Paul would simply be asserting that Christ is divided by virtue of their factions. More likely, though, Paul asks a rhetorical question which implies that Christ cannot be divided, and thus the divisions are quite shocking. Focusing on human beings is quite intolerable, and, so as not to cast aspersions on Peter or Apollos, Paul uses himself as an example. Centring on Paul is contrary to the faith the Corinthians embraced, for Paul was not crucified for them, nor were they baptized in Paul's name. The Corinthians are reminded that their faith is in Jesus Christ as the

crucified one—a theme that will play a significant role in the discussion that follows. Furthermore, the attachment of some to Paul misconstrues the import of baptism, suggesting that perhaps some were boasting that Paul baptized them. Baptism, however, is in the name of Christ, and thus the person who performed the baptism is insignificant.

14–16 Paul continues the discussion of baptism, which suggests that some may have taken pride in having been baptized by Paul. The wrong understanding of baptism in Corinth causes Paul to give thanks that he baptized only *Crispus and Gaius*. Crispus here is probably the same Crispus who was the leader of the synagogue in Corinth and was converted to Christ (Acts 18:8). Gaius here is not the Gaius of Derbe (Acts 19:29; 20:4), but is probably the same person mentioned in Romans 16:23 and there commended for providing hospitality for travelling believers. Gaius was obviously a man of some wealth to support the church in this way. Paul thus remembers baptizing two persons who were prominent and influential in the Corinthian church.

Paul's main point is that he is thankful that he limited those whom he baptized so that people would not boast that they *were baptized in my name* (1:15). Such boasting is a travesty since Christ died for believers, and thus all the glory belongs to him instead of to mere human beings. As Paul reflects further on whom he baptized, he recalls that he also *baptized the household of Stephanas*. Stephanas and his household reappear in 16:15, where we are told that they were among the first converted in Achaia. The Corinthians are urged to 'submit' to him (16:16), and thus he apparently played a significant role as a church leader in the congregation. It is also clear from 16:17 that Stephanas was among the delegation that came to visit Paul.

Paul began by saying he baptized only Crispus and Gaius (1:14), but he goes on to include the household of Stephanas (1:16) and then confesses that he cannot recall if he baptized anyone else. Paul communicates to the Corinthians that the person who performed the baptism is utterly insignificant. By paying attention to the person who baptized them, they were missing out on the true import of baptism.

17 Paul gives an explanation as to why baptism is relativized, explaining that his focus was on preaching the gospel. Such preaching, however, must not concentrate on the eloquence of the speaker, for doing so robs the cross of Christ of its power. It might seem odd for Paul to say that he was not sent to baptize since, according to Matthew 28:19, one of the elements of making disciples is baptizing them. What Paul communicates, however, is that baptism must be subordinated to and understood within the context of the gospel. Baptism does not actually convey salvation; only faith in Jesus Christ does. The fascination of some Corinthians with the fact that Paul had baptized them reveals that their understanding of baptism had departed from the gospel.

Preaching the gospel (*euangelizesthai*) means that one tells or proclaims news, and always has the idea of oral proclamation (cf. 1 Sam. 31:9; 2 Sam. 1:20; 18:20; Ps. 39:10 lxx; Nah. 1:15). Here the good news (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–4) proclaimed centres on Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Lord. In the Old Testament the good news for Israel included the promise of return from exile (Isa. 40:9; 52:7; 61:1). Israel was exiled because of its sin (Isa. 40:2; 42:24; 43:24, 25; Jer. 30:15), and forgiveness would come through the death of the servant of the Lord (Isa. 52:13–53:12; cf. Jer. 31:34; 33:8; Dan. 9:24). Paul sees return from exile and the promise of forgiveness as fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Paul adds a qualification regarding proclaiming the gospel, insisting that he does not do so *with wisdom and eloquence* (*en sophia logou*). Many scholars now agree that what Paul opposes here is Greek rhetoric. Speakers were prized and praised in the Graeco-Roman world, and they were assessed by their rhetorical brilliance. Handbooks were written on correct rhetorical style by ancient writers such as Quintilian and Cicero. Probably the Corinthians were assessing Paul and Apollos based on their rhetorical effectiveness and brilliance. There is probably also a sociological component here (cf. 1:26–28), for brilliant rhetoric would appeal especially to the beautiful and the rich. What Paul criticizes here is a focus on style instead of substance such that hearers are swayed

by the artistry of the speaker rather than by the message of the cross. Bruce Winter argues that Paul criticizes the oratory of the Second Sophistic in which competitive oratory and showmanship became the focus in speaking. One could become entranced with the skill and the power of the speaker and fail to grasp the message of the cross. Another way to put it is that the medium must match the message. If the medium features the brilliance and the craft of human beings, it subverts the message of the cross that humbles human beings and reveals to them their spiritual poverty.[1]

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

In the *Cornerstone Bible Commentary*, William Baker contrasts the real wisdom that comes from God with the foolishness of worldly wisdom.

Paul must have realized that his case for the indivisibility of Christianity based on the relatively small number of baptisms he performed in Corinth was not sufficient to carry his point (Barrett 1968:51). Thus, he chose to delve deeper into the contrast between the gospel proclamation and mere human articulations of wisdom announced in 1:17. Despite the fact that he will make no direct reference back to the divisive atmosphere in Corinth (Hays 1997:28), the intended message to the Corinthians becomes clear: The divine message of the cross is reduced to just another human philosophy if it is identified as originating with any of its messengers.

The opening verse of this salvo, 1:18, functions as a thesis statement Paul will attempt to explicate in the verses that follow, at least through the end of the chapter. "The message of the cross," a unique phrase in the New Testament, picks up on Paul's preaching of the Good News of the cross in 1:17. For Paul, though, the cross was no mere message; it was the cataclysmic event in human history by which God has now divided people into two groups, the only two groups that ultimately mean anything and that are utterly and purposefully divisive: the destroyed and the saved (Garland 2003:63).

Thus, when proclaimed faithfully, the message of the cross creates this division, similar to the way Jesus' parables and activities were calculated to divide people into disciples or enemies (Mark 4:10–12). Thus, the "foolish," or spiritually dense who think the gospel message dumb when they hear it, place themselves in the "destroyed" category. By contrast, "the saved" recognize and experience God's work through the cross.

Paul plowed the fertile field of Isaiah's prophecies in 1:19 for the first of 20 Old Testament citations he will employ in the course of 1 Corinthians, six more of which will appear in this immediate context (1:31; 2:9, 16; 3:19, 20; 5:13) with a total of six Isaiah quotations in the book (2:16; 14:21, 25; 15:32, 54). The heavy use of Isaiah in 1 Corinthians should not be surprising since it is, as Collins (1999:95) notes, far and away Paul's favorite Old Testament book to quote (28 times), followed by Psalms (20 times), Deuteronomy (15 times), and Genesis (15 times). The quotation, though relying on the authority of the Old Testament, is far more than a proof text (Soards 1999:52). As Paul employs it, it functions as prophetic prediction (note the future tense) that was poignantly fulfilled in the cross. For Paul this is no simple general truth about God and human wisdom. The cross itself is the divine moment in history when God shatters all human efforts to explain the world and its purposes, however noble and brilliant, that came before it and will come after it.

Ironically, Paul uses his own rhetorical flair in 1:20, a string of three simple questions that indict three models of professional human brilliance as condemned to idiocy by the prediction of Isaiah 29:14. Though each can be generalized to apply to the most brilliant human specimens of any culture (probably today we would have to add the scientist, computer genius, and movie director), they stand as a unit of failed human effort to make sense of the world as we know it. Paul addresses now in particular the "destroyed" class of people (1:18) who consider the gospel of the cross to be dumb. On the contrary, says Paul, the cross makes the work of their best representatives, the most brilliant of the brilliant, dumb or "foolish."

[1] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 61–65.

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What Paul conveys rhetorically in 1:20 he states matter-of-factly in 1:21. The maze of the world does not include a map to find God, and God designed it that way on purpose. The wise of the world think they are getting somewhere, but they cannot see the "satellite" view that shows them circling around and around getting further and further from God. What Paul says here he will flesh out in detail when he writes Romans 1:18–32. And try as they might, humans cannot reason themselves to a full-orbed understanding of God, much less an intimate, personal relationship with him. Pascal (1966) and Kierkegaard (1958) had it right when they argued that truly knowing God goes beyond reason, and Hans Küng (1978) brilliantly documents the failed human quest to reason our way to God.

But even if God could be proved, this would not give us what only the gospel message provides: a path toward full acceptance into God's presence. Only the message of the cross accomplishes this, and even it makes no sense on a human level. Only this proclaimed message based on a divine act of justice and love on the cross creates a "saved" class of people. Thus, what he says here applies to both Jews and Greeks, for although the Jews know God to a degree, and Greeks not at all, the full revelation did not come until the cross.

In 1:22, Paul characterizes Jews as seeking confirmatory signs of God's messages to them and Hellenic Greeks as craving learning and knowledge. The Greek penchant for learning was widely known. Herodotus, a fifth-century bc Greek historian, says, "All Greeks were zealous for every kind of learning" (Histories 4:77). For their part, Jews demanded confirmatory signs not only from Moses and others in the Old Testament but from Jesus as well (Matt 16:1; Mark 8:11; John 2:18).

In 1:23, Paul indicates that he does not conform the gospel to the Greeks' liking nor does he subject it to the Jews' inspection methods. The gospel is what it is, the story of a crucified man from Galilee whose submission to a humiliating and painful death occurred because it was essential to God's plan to make a way for all people to be saved from their rebellion against him. If this redemptive act splits humankind into believers and unbelievers rather than their normal, ethnic divisions, then that's part of God's plan. Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah seems to have hinged on their expectation that he would be a conquering hero over the Romans rather than a seemingly failed and crucified insurrectionist. Greek rejection of Jesus as the Son of God seems to have resided not only in the generally repulsive idea of Jesus being crucified but also in the concept of a perfect god taking on human flesh, since in their minds human flesh was corrupt. Only a very low god would subject himself to such a menial form of existence, even temporarily.

Paul spoke in 1:23 of Jews and Gentiles as representative classes of humanity who have rejected and will continue to reject Christ. In contrast to that truth, 1:24 reports that individuals have embraced the gospel of the cross from across the spectrum of human cultures, including Jews and Greeks (using Hellēnes again, corresponding to 1:22). These, then, are the exceptional minority who were spiritually open to God's call through the offensive message, just like the few in Jesus' crowds who understood and welcomed the odd truths of Jesus' parables. They accepted the gospel message of the cross and were transformed by its power that Paul introduced in 1:18. Not only that, instead of being divided as Jews and Greeks, they now are united in the class of people who are "saved." In order to do this, the special contingent of first-generation Christians must have seen the futility of their own cultures' efforts to find God and opened their eyes to the wonder of the cross as wisdom on a completely different plane, just as Christians still must do.

In 1:25, Paul sums up his point by constructing a set of clauses that compare the incomparable: God's wisdom and human wisdom. He drenches his comparisons with rhetorical irony so that it is obvious that God's "wise" plan to save humanity is really in a league of its own, untainted by any thought of comparison with any form of "human" wisdom. Thus, even God's so-called "foolishness" is wiser than the most brilliant of human wisdom. To the point of the discussion, God's plan to save humanity is in a totally superior category because it overcomes the evil of sin, which separates humanity from God. It's not just an idea, a philosophy, or a discovery; it is a completed plan of action that has created an entirely new world order of "the saved" and "the destroyed," which cuts across ethnic differences and national borders.

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Though Paul will expand on his theme of God's wisdom and foolishness in ensuing verses, he begins by first calling on the Corinthians in 1:26 to recall their own social standing when they responded to God's call to the gospel. Of course, they knew that Paul was aware of their social condition, too, since he personally brought them the gospel. Paul picked out two broad categories of socially prestigious people: those who acquired prestige through politics and those who got it through inheritance.

Although Paul's point emphasizes the rarity of such types of people in the Corinthian church, contemporary investigation tends to note that his statement allows for "some" believers to have been in such socially strategic positions in Corinth (Wuellner 1973:672). People with large enough homes for other believers to meet in, like Gaius (Rom 16:23), Stephanas, perhaps Crispus, Chloe (the businesswoman whose "people" have informed Paul in Ephesus), and Erastus, Corinth's "city treasurer" (Rom 16:23), likely numbered among the influential "some." Whether Corinth should be considered typical or exceptional among the churches Paul planted in this regard is debated (Judge 1960:49–61; Theissen 1982:69–119). But the tendency is to view all of Paul's churches as socially and economically mixed. Paul could also be emphasizing that the initial respondents to the gospel were lower class, while more people of prestige have joined the community since then and are part of the problem now.

In 1:27–28, Paul explains that not being among the social elite in fact is an advantage when it comes to God's modus operandi. In contrast to human operations, the social elite are not at the top. A reversal of the social order should be expected because God has shown this pattern consistently in history, from leading the slave nation of Israel to the Promised Land to granting lowly Hannah and Mary children who were instrumental to God's plans. Then the Corinthians are themselves yet another exhibit of this pattern and should consider themselves blessed. In the end, God's upside-down pattern will not take place behind the scenes of human history. Rather, the humiliation of the wise and powerful will be on public display for all to see. In the Greek text of these verses, only the adjective "wise" refers to a person; the rest, "foolish," "powerful," and "powerless," technically refer to "things" (neuter). This suggests that Paul's lens had a wide scope on this as a principle of God that goes beyond human factors in God's purposes.

In 1:28, Paul accentuates this sense of principle by using the neuter form four more times. Things the world has no use for, things lowly and "despised," God puts to good use. Artfully, Paul gathers these two descriptions up as "the things that are not," and explains their lofty purpose in God's plans, to make "the things that are" (according to those other than God) empty and lowly themselves. Indeed, the Corinthian believers themselves were part of this paradoxical reversal, which continues to take place as the gospel is preached and accepted and will be finalized in the eschatological future.

Anticipating the Scripture citation in 1:31, Paul pronounces the underlying truth of this divine reversal of social position. At the end of the day, God is smarter, stronger, truer than all his creatures, even the human variety, who seem easily to forget this. Just as Job went speechless when he finally got his audience with God (Job 42:1–6), so on the eschatological day the most egotistical will go silent in God's holy presence.

Before he gets to the Scripture citation, Paul draws together in 1:30 themes he had touched on since 1:18. The Corinthian believers had been blessed by God to be in their position, safely tucked away into the saving work of Christ. This has not happened because they were persuaded by some brand of human brilliance or because they were social elites. It happened because of what Christ did, specifically on the cross. But this was not an action Christ took totally of his own accord; it was a crucial event in God's plan to provide salvation to all who would believe. In that act, Christ became the culmination of all God's wisdom—and the message of the cross encapsulates this. Thus, this new position of acceptance before God is not anything the Corinthian believers should feel like they deserve. It had been handed to them by the despicable act of suffering and death that Christ experienced on the cross.

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This strange kind of "wisdom" Paul attempts to explain with three theological terms he uses very commonly, especially in Romans—namely, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (see notes on 1:30). When accepted, this kind of "wisdom" transforms believers, totally transfiguring their relationship with God. Those once condemned to death as in a court of law because of sin, those too contaminated to take part in temple proceedings, and those consigned to a lifetime of slavery—now because of being in Christ are released from execution, cleansed for use in the temple, and freed from slavery. Each of these images is a way of saying that Christ puts believers into a radically new relationship with God that is not possible by any other means humans might devise.

Some speculate that the mention made in 1:30 of Christ as "wisdom" connects to Jewish development of wisdom into a personified, preexistent, divine figure, both involved in creation and functioning as a medium by which people can access God's truth (Prov 8:22–31; Wis 7:22–8:1; Barrett 1968:60). However, no clear indicators in this passage make this connection, despite its critical importance to christological development in the New Testament (Hays 1997:33; Thiselton 2000:192).

The citation of what is essentially Jeremiah 9:24 (with perhaps some influence from 1 Samuel 2:10) in the Septuagint (Hays 1997:34; Robertson and Plummer 1911:28) is a rhetorical capstone to what has preceded and a kind of bookend with the Isaiah 29:14 quotation in 1:19. Whereas Isaiah 29:14 states the negative, Jeremiah 9:24 states the positive: "Those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know [the Lord]." For Paul, it represents what those in the class of "saved" will say on that eschatological day when standing before God. They rightfully can boast of what the Lord has done for them in Christ—in Christ crucified—and be warmly accepted by God. By contrast, those in the class of "destroyed"—however smart or important—can and will say nothing as God metes out their punishment of destruction.[2]

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5

In the *Pillar New Testament Commentary*, Roy Ciampa looks at Paul's humble ministry strategy and how it connects with the wisdom of God.

2:1 As the opening words of this verse ("as for me") indicate, Paul's third argument, that the proclamation of the gospel cannot be a form of human wisdom, is from personal experience. The last point at which he wrote in the first-person singular was in 1:17, where he likewise spoke of his work in "preaching the gospel." Hence 2:1–5 takes up where 1:17 left off. Paul's point here is that the manner of his preaching to the Corinthians when he first came to them was not according to human wisdom. Rather, the man and his way of conducting himself matched his message; weakness and foolishness characterized them both. Paul was no more impressive than his proclamation of a failed Messiah. Emphatically, then, Paul *did not come with eloquence or human wisdom*. This is borne out elsewhere in his letters: some Corinthians said of Paul, "in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing" (2 Cor. 10:10), and his initial preaching in Galatia was accompanied by "illness" (Gal. 4:14). Paul's modesty is no rhetorical exaggeration. His activity of proclaiming the gospel was often attended by difficult circumstances and factors that would have prevented him were it not for his sense of obligation: "I am compelled to preach" (9:16).

The Greek word for *eloquence* in the phrase "eloquence of word" appears rarely in the New Testament, and its precise meaning is disputed. It contains a probable metaphorical reference to height or excess.101 Hence, RSV/NRSV renders it as "lofty words," Thiselton, "high-sounding rhetoric," and TEV, "big words." Unlike the sophists who paraded their cleverness in self-display, Paul did not speak of himself but focused on someone else, namely, Jesus Christ (as v. 2 makes clear). Paul's public speaking, whether in the synagogue, in private homes, or in more public settings, came without pomp and elicited no applause, nor was it meant to. His role as herald (see on 1:17) was simply to be a proclaimer, the faithful bearer of a message.

[2] William Baker, "1 Corinthians," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians*, vol. 15 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 37–41.

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The content of Paul's proclamation is *the testimony*, or "mystery," *about God*. Whether or not "mystery" is a better reading here, both terms, as Thiselton notes, "emphasize that what is conveyed in Christian proclamation is truth revealed by God, not human opinions." A "mystery" in the New Testament is a gift of divine revelation, and a "testimony" refers to the content of what is witnessed to. In neither case can the speaker lay any claim to any personal insight. Paul's use of either word here instead of "gospel" suits his argument.

2:2 Paul explains further why his preaching in Corinth was not in words of human wisdom: his message focused on a crucified Messiah. He *resolved to know*[106] *nothing … except Jesus Christ and him crucified*. This assertion recalls 1:18–25. The close association in Paul's mind of the Messiah with his death can scarcely be overstated. As noted earlier, to speak enthusiastically of an executed deliverer-king was an oxymoron. Nonetheless, such preaching was Paul's regular pattern throughout his ministry. Recalling his preaching to the Galatians, he writes: "Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was portrayed as crucified" (3:1).

Again in contrast to "the wise" in Corinth and in the church, who could expatiate endlessly on all sorts of subjects, all Paul wanted to talk about was "the cross of Christ" (1:17). On first blush this may seem rather narrow and limited. After all, Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth and would have engaged in pastoral work alongside evangelism. However, as 1 Corinthians 1:10–4:17 itself demonstrates, for Paul even the most practical ills, such as divisions and problems of leadership in the church, are remedied by focusing on the cross. For Paul, *Christ crucified* is more than just the means of forgiveness and salvation; rather, it informs his total vision of the Christian life and ministry.

2:3 Paul's humble demeanor in first encountering the Corinthians could be seen not only in his words but also in his actions: he came … *in weakness with great fear and trembling*. This was the very opposite of the self-confident assertion expected of a cultured orator. It is also very different from how some "arrogant people are talking" in the church in Corinth (4:19).

Just as the message was weak (1:25), so the messenger came in *weakness*. It is difficult to know with certainty what Paul is referring to at this point. A number of commentators follow Albert Schweitzer in suggesting that Paul has some humiliating illness in mind. As Collins puts it, "Paul's description of his weakness may reflect his real situation."111 In Galatians 4:13–14 Paul says that he preached the gospel, literally, in "weakness of the flesh," which the TNIV uncontroversially translates as "an illness." And in 1 Corinthians 11:30 the adjective is used of some Corinthians' being "*weak* and sick." While a reference to a physical ailment is not out of the question, Paul's *weakness* in 2:3 could be a number of things, such as a general sense of inadequacy for the task of evangelizing the city (cf. 2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5). His weakness could also be his menial trade, his relative impoverishment, his vulnerability to persecution, or his unimpressive presence.

In any case, *weakness* suits the echo of Zechariah 4:6 mentioned above. In his laying of the foundation of the new temple in Corinth, Paul's work is "not by might, nor by power." That such weakness marks an apostle will be touched on again in 4:9–13, a passage which demonstrates the range of possible meanings of the term: "we are weak, … we are hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless, we work hard with our own hands, … we are persecuted" (4:10). As Weber notes, "it is in the nature of the cross that it cannot be preached elegantly and brilliantly, but only in weakness." The weak Paul shares the sufferings and death of Christ in order to bring life to the Corinthians and glory to God.

The precise referent of *great fear and trembling* is also difficult to pin down with certainty. Was Paul afraid (1) of a new setting with large crowds (Robertson and Plummer), without the support of his co-workers Silas and Timothy (according to Acts 17:15; 18:5); (2) of the magnitude of the task ahead of him (Fee; cf. Acts 18:9–11); (3) because of his personal inadequacy (Lightfoot, Bruce, Witherington); or (4) for his personal safety (Calvin, Barrett; cf. Acts 18:9; Ps. 55:5)?

Savage offers a fifth view based on the use of the phrase in the LXX, where it often depicts a humble response to the awe-inspiring majesty of God.115 Hence, he paraphrases: Paul came to Corinth "in

profound humility and trepidation." But this humility was as much before God as before his fellows. Given Paul's prolific use of Scripture in the letter, taking *fear and trembling* as a biblical phrase pointing to his reverence before the majesty of God in the task of preaching the gospel is a strong possibility. Paul's clearest reference to "the fear of God" is in 2 Corinthians 7:1, which follows directly after a catena of Old Testament quotations in 6:16–18. In this case, Paul's weakness would refer to his posture toward the Corinthians and his fear and trembling toward God. Such vulnerability denuded Paul of self-importance, pride, and a competitive spirit, "qualities" so characteristic of the Corinthian sophists to whom he was being unfavorably compared. It stripped him of self-reliance and left him with no alternative but to trust in God. If Savage's interpretation is right, along with "faith" in v. 5, Paul's *fear and trembling* is itself an expression of this trust.

2:4 Not only was Paul's manner uninspiring when he came to preach the gospel in Corinth, so too was his presentation: *my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words*. The repetition of the personal pronouns suggests that Paul distinguished between his *message* (literally, "word") and his *preaching*. Commentators have suggested the first refers to form and the second to content, the how and what of proclamation, or the first to private and the second to public discourse. However, usage does not support such distinctions; the words are interchangeable. Together they encompass all of Paul's speaking as an apostle. Why then the redundancy? Information theory suggests a number of reasons for such repetition, including emphasis, clarification, assurance of attention, and filling in gaps for rhythmic balance.121 In this case, it may be stylistic, to have *message and preaching* repeat the rhythm of "fear and trembling" from the previous verse so as to emphasize the comprehensive nature of Paul's singularly unimpressive first impression in Corinth. Nonetheless, Paul was in good company: Moses claimed lack of eloquence (Exod. 4:10), Isaiah had unclean lips (Isa. 6:5), and Jeremiah did "not know how to speak," for he was "only a youth" (Jer. 1:6). God regularly chooses to work through human weakness.

His failure to speak with *wise and persuasive words* turns the contrast between Paul and the sophists up to full volume. As Witherington plausibly infers, "[t]he Corinthians felt that they had the right to judge Paul and his message and were evaluating him by the same criteria by which popular orators and teachers were judged." Paul's speaking generated no applause. As noted above (see on v. 18), the sophist's goal was persuasion by the manipulation of arguments and skillful rhetoric. Paul's goal was the manifestation of God's power in people's lives.

Instead of "enticing, clever words" (Thiselton) to win his audience, what accompanied Paul's preaching was *a demonstration of the Spirit's power*. "A demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (NRSV, NASB), to translate literally, has been understood by the TNIV as a hendiadys, a figure of speech in which two words connected by "and" express a single idea. An example in current English is the phrase, "nice and warm."123 Fee supplies the validation for taking "Spirit" and "power" together here: "for Paul the terms 'Spirit' and 'power' are at times nearly interchangeable; to speak of the Spirit is to speak of power." Tellingly, *demonstration*, a hapax in the New Testament, is a technical term in rhetoric for proof given in a compelling speech. "The convincing proof" (TEV) that Paul's speaking supplies is not what the Corinthians might have expected. Paul uses the term polemically. The Corinthians wanted a *demonstration* of rhetorical gifts; Paul offers instead proof that is based on the fact that God's Spirit is powerfully at work.

In what, then, did *the Spirit's power* consist? Does the collocation of "Spirit" and "power" imply Spirit-empowered miracles? Is Paul talking here about "deeds of power" (1 Cor. 12:28), translated "miracles" in the TNIV? In other words, did "signs and wonders" (Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12) accompany Paul's preaching in Corinth? Fee rightly notes that the "demonstration of the Spirit and power" here cannot be taken as a reference to miracles since in the context of 1 Corinthians this is the very triumphalist assumption Paul is arguing against. In contrast to Jewish requests for signs and the Greek desire for wisdom, Paul preaches Christ crucified (cf. 1:22–23). It would thus be a little odd, as Fee notes, if Paul were to appeal to powerful signs and wonders that persuaded hearers! In the context of his own personal weakness, the demonstration of the Spirit's power is seen in the Corinthians' conversion, as the Spirit applies the word of the gospel, Christ and him crucified, to their hearts: "the evidence

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lies with the Corinthians themselves and their own experience of the Spirit as they responded to the message of the gospel." The plural of *power* would have been a more unambiguous reference to miracles. *Power* here is about moral conviction, not miraculous display.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 confirms this understanding. In Thessalonica, Paul reports, "our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit." The following context makes clear that the evidence of this power was the "deep conviction" and changed lives of the Thessalonians: "you welcomed the message" (1:6). Paul tells the Corinthians the same thing. Paul insists that it is not sophisticated speech, nor even signs and wonders, but your Spirit-wrought conversion which represents the best proof of the truth of my message (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13).

2:5 The conjunction *so that* signals the purpose of Paul's preaching with "a demonstration of the Spirit's power" and not "with wise and persuasive words." He did so in order that the Corinthians might trust in God and not in human wisdom. This verse looks back to 1:17 and hence closes off the section in bookend fashion. Hence, to *rest your faith on God's power* is the equivalent of not having "the cross of Christ emptied of its power" (to save). 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5 is effectively an explanation of 1:17. Paul did not distance himself from the sophists in Corinth for personal reasons or because of his own tastes, but for the sake of the Corinthians. Rather than being persuaded by his cleverness and guile, Paul wants his hearers to respond to the truth clearly presented.

This response he labels faith. *Faith*, like "flesh" and "truth," is "a polymorphous concept" needing to be defined according to its context. General definitions can distort or mask its meaning in any particular instance. In most of Paul's usage it refers to the human response to the proclamation of the gospel, the main components of which are belief, trust, and obedience.131 Here the first and second of these aspects are prominent: it refers to "an intellectual conviction of truth [belief] and a stance of heart and will which exhibits trust in God's salvific act in Christ as the basis of life [trust]." To have *your faith rest on God's power* in the context of 1:18–2:5 is to believe the cross to be the way of salvation, being convinced by the work of the Spirit in your own and other believers' lives, and to shun any trust in self and human wisdom as a way to God. Just as in Romans, Paul teaches that to attain righteousness a person must dismiss their own righteousness, so in 1 Corinthians to receive God's wisdom and experience his power it is necessary to relinquish your own wisdom and power.

With 2:5 the series of contrasts that Paul introduced in 1:17 is thus complete: Paul's gospel comes: (1) not with (human) wisdom, but with (God's) foolishness, (2) not with (the world's) power, but with (Paul's and God's) weakness, (3) not to the things that are, but to the things that are not, and (4) not with a demonstration of rhetorical skill, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power. Zechariah 4:6, which Paul echoes in 2:1–5, serves as a fitting summary of this final paragraph of the section: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."[3]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mark A. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary
Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (NICNT)
Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)
Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary
Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary
David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, The Bible Speaks Today
William Baker, *1 Corinthians*, Cornerstone Bible Commentary
Paul Ellingwroth and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on 1 Corinthians*, UBSH

[3]Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 113–119.