

# 1 Corinthians 1.10 - 31

---

*The Living Gospel Part 2 | The Great Sin  
February 26, 2017 – Spence Shelton*

Just a reminder next weekend is community group Sunday! This facility that we meet in each week is booked that Sunday. We are having church, just in community groups. But you gotta RSVP. If you haven't signed up be sure to do so. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, be sure to pay attention at the end of service today!

If you have your bible - 1 Corinthians 1 starting in verse 10. Paul today is going to declare war on the most toxic, destructive sin the human race has ever encountered. PRIDE. Lucky for you, I am an expert in Pride. *Illustration – Freshman & Sophomore. I said to her “I could see myself marrying you. But I just don’t want a girlfriend right now.” Underneath that – I am such a catch. I gotta play the field. And she was at an all girls school anyway. PRIDE!*

In fact C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* devoted a whole chapter to this sin and he called it the “Great Sin.” He said “the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”

You might think...that's a little strong. **Pride** is the ultimate sin? But think about it.

First: the reason it is so destructive, is because we don't see it. Pride is one of those deadly diseases that you never realize you have, but it makes everyone around you sick. I've got a pastor friend who told me that he once had a woman come up to him after church and say “You are a truly great man.” So he went home that night and said to his wife...how many truly great men do you think there are in the world? Her reply – One less than you think. Pride can be a huge blind spot!

Pride is also destructive b/c it is by nature competitive. Pride compares you to the person across from you and tempts you to look down on that person because you are better than they are. Or, it tempts you to be dissatisfied with your life because they seem to be better off than you. Pride is the only vice that doesn't enjoy company. People with other vices can get along (drunks, immoral, drug addicts) but the proud can't get along because their desire to be better than the other person pits them in competition with one another. <sup>1</sup>

Lewis says that the quickest way to tell that you have pride is that some other person's pride bothers you. For example, You get mad when somebody gets a new car, because you

---

<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

just know that now they think they're something and this bothers you because deep down you want to be thought of as something and the fact that people are now thinking this other person is something means they're not thinking that you're something so you're mad because said person took your something-ness away from you.

We all deal with it! Pastors as much as anyone. There is such a tug to want a big church or to want my name to be held in high esteem among others. I want to be better than every other pastor so they will all look up to me and admire me. And we are so fickle we can even get jealous when God uses another pastor and we'll secretly hope he fails somehow. I'm telling you we are no better than anyone else.

Have you EVER once compared yourself to another? Ever felt jealous? Ever felt like you deserved something more than someone else? Like you were better than someone? Welcome to pride.

Welcome to the church at Corinth. Everyone is looking down on everyone else for different reasons. The rich are looking down on the poor, Educated on the uneducated, and in today's passage the spiritual know it-alls are looking down on one another and on the rest of the church. Because they are more spiritual than the others. And that creates disunity...which is wrecking the church.

Paul is going to look at this pride and take the gospel lesson he mentioned in the introduction and say...look at your life

through the gospel! Stop playing the comparison game!! It's going to be powerful and all I can say is...every. Single. Person in here needs this. Ok. If you don't think pride is a sin you deal with...then that just means you need a double dose today.

So we are going to walk through this section and I'm going to help you see Paul's argument and then summarize a gospel response to pride you can pray every day.

### **The Goal**

[10] I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

For the better part of 3 chapters Paul is going to come back to this goal. The purpose of everything he's about to say is for the church to be united. This unity is important for two reasons.

**1: the church cannot survive without it.** I've personally seen conflict tear down 2 churches and the reason so many from my generation left the church isn't because they logically reasoned their way away from faith, but because of division and conflict they experienced in their church. In their pride, some people thought they were better than other people and somebody got hurt because of it.

Paul knows unity in the church is fragile but incredibly powerful. And the only way to maintain it is to go to war on pride.

The other reason unity is important is because **it is the visible marking by which non-Christians will judge the validity of the Christian message.** Jesus said so in John 13:35 – By this all people will know that you are my disciples – if you love one another. John 17:21 – he prays they are ONE so that the watching world will believe Christ is who he says he is. Unity, expressed in love of one another, is the litmus test Jesus sets out. So if you are here and you are not a Christian, Jesus says for you to test the message by looking at how the Christians are loving each other. Are they, despite all their socio-economic differences, racial diffs, age diffs, - are they unified?

When the church is unified. When we are loving each other well – we make a powerful declaration about the gospel. That the love of Christ tears down racial, age, and socio-economic boundaries to create one new family we are all equal in. A declaration that Jesus says will be attractive to the watching world who so desperately desires to be a part of a community who loves one another like that. But right now the Corinthians aren't there yet. Listen:

### **The problem**

[11] For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. [12] What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."

Ok here's the problem. Members of the church were creating factions under their favorite preachers. Paul, Apollos, Cephas. Some were being smarty pants and saying

their way was the Jesus way. We still do stuff like this today. Create factions in the church that are silly.

- Bible translations – I knew some friends who came out of a KJV only church. That was the right translation and all others were wrong. "If the king aint on it the king aint in it."
- Calvinism vs Arminianism – Does God predestine us or do we have free will to choose God? Well according to the bible the answer is...YES. So Really? You want to die on one of those hills? I promise if you ascribe wholeheartedly to either of those you will be frustrated at times here at Mercy. Because the bible will not fit neatly into your formula you want to lay on top of it.
- There's the worship styles – The Crazy Charismatics vs the Frozen Chosen. You know the people who believe they have to experience the worship and the others who are more reflective. And you get mad when their hands are in the way of your sightline to see the words.
- There's favorite preachers - Some of you are more beholden to your favorite podcast preacher than you are to Jesus Christ. Listen I'm all for good preaching to help you learn more about Jesus. We have a podcast of Mercy sermons. But if you can recite more sermon quotes than bible verses I'd say you have a problem.

There are All kinds of things church people can argue about. But what does Paul say?

[13] Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? .....

Notice he says – Is Christ Divided? Paul’s logic is not “is the church divided,” but “what does your division and sin say about the person of Christ?” We lie to the world about Christ when we are divided over non-essential things like worship preferences, race, even some minor doctrines that we can disagree on and still be in unity over. Paul is saying these arguments are symptoms that you’ve lost sight of Christ! Paul didn’t die for you, Paul didn’t baptize you in the name of the Father, the Apostle Paul, and the Holy Spirit. NO...You do not belong to Paul, you belong to Jesus.

In fact, verse 17 - [17] 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 its power.

Paul is saying listen, I wasn’t a great preacher. I wasn’t eloquent and hey, that was good. Because that way you knew for sure that anything powerful I said never came from me but from Christ. Paul’s weakness as a preacher magnified the power of the cross. Such good news for me.

Story of Courtney coming to Faith – Told it already?

Terrible illustration in a church filled with secret sin. God uses it. Courtney wasn’t impressed by a great speaker. The power of God saved her. Period. Nothing else can explain that. Paul says that right here in 18 watch...

[18] 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.

The Cross... that’s where the power is for those of us who are being saved. I.E. the church. But to everyone else the cross is a joke. Then...he goes to war against pride at a much bigger level. He is helping the church to zoom out and see

[19] For it is written, (He’s quoting Isaiah 29.14. NT authors do this a lot to remind us the bible is in fact consistent from beginning to end)

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

This is God’s declaration of war against Pride. In particular those who claim to have knowledge or wisdom that is not from God.

[20] Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ....

In (v. 20) He expands beyond the church to talk about the whole world and he hits **2 groups of people**<sup>2</sup>:

- 1:20, Where is the wise man/philosopher (debater)?

---

<sup>2</sup> I am borrowing this commentary on verse 20 through to the “when we look for truth” comment from J.D. Greear’s sermon on this passage preached in the *Authentic Christianity* Sermon Series I believe in 2011. Such good stuff!

- The Greeks were far advanced in their scientists and their philosophers. Schools of Plato; Aristotle; Hippocrates... look around though. How many are in the church?
- 1:20, Where is the scribe?
  - “Grammateus” implies “scribe,” the expert in the law of God. They fared no better than philosophers. *(Paul has thus covered Greek wise men—philosophers and scientists) and Jewish wise men (scribes).*<sup>3</sup> *Neither of them! Neither the scientific braniacs or the theologians... none of them found God.*

When I was in college and just out of college one of my bigger struggles was how come more people didn't know God through wisdom. It would have made sense to me that all of the world's smartest people would believe the Christian message.

But is that what happened? No. The scientific and philosophic communities as a whole have not led the way in knowing God. Charles Darwin, Stephen Hawking and Richard Dawkins rather, have tried to explain how the universe came to existence without God. Hegel and Marx tried to explain the progress of history without God. Freud and Jung and Skinner and Rogers tried to explain how people got screwed up without reference to sin. Incredibly bright history scholars like Will Durant or Bart Ehrman

---

<sup>3</sup> (D.A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 17)

have tried to explain the birth of Christianity apart from the resurrection of Christ.

*Am I saying that history and science and psychology don't all point to God?* Not at all. I think the clearest look at those things shows that science, history, our personalities, the whole universe, points to God. It's just that mankind's supposed wisdom has never really led to God. And for a while I considered this a knock against Christianity, but then I read what Paul is saying here. Man's problem isn't a knowledge problem. It's a pride problem.

We are proud and self-centered. We don't look for God and think of His glory, we think of our own glory. **Proof:** When you look at a picture, *Whose face do you look for first? Ever re-run an argument? Ever lost?*

When we look for truth, we're not really looking for the truth of God's glory at all; we're inventing ways to exalt our pride or express our independence from God.

George Wald, the 1967 Nobel prize winning American Scientist “There are only 2 options as to how life arose. One is spontaneous generation leading to evolution. The other is a supernatural creative act of God. There is no 3<sup>rd</sup> possibility. Spontaneous generation, that life arose from non-living matter was scientifically disproved about 120 years ago by Louis Pasteur and others. That leaves us with only one possible conclusion—that life arose as a supernatural creative act of God. I will not accept that philosophically because I do not want to believe in God. Therefore I choose to believe in that which I know is

**scientifically impossible—spontaneous generation leading to evolution.”<sup>4</sup>**

Many reject the gospel NOT because its irrational, they don't believe because of their pride! Then Paul begins to reveal the upside down nature of the gospel and the church. Hang in there this is so important:

### **The Bigger Answer**

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

This and verse 31 are probably the two key verses of this passage today. Paul calls the gospel “folly.” It's foolish. Some of you that have been Christians for a while may have forgotten the foolishness of the gospel. At least, the apparent foolishness.

There is one All powerful all knowing being that created the world and that is intimately involved in creating each of us and sustaining the world. In fact this being you call God calls you his child. You rebelled against this Father/God being and the penalty is physical and spiritual death.

Eternity separated from God. And the only way out of your predicament is for God to send his own son...who is also God...but not a separate God just a separate person made up of the same substance...To come to earth as a human as die in your place. He died, then resurrected from the grave giving you victory over death too. When he left he sent the

---

<sup>4</sup> George Wald, “Innovation and Biology,” *Scientific American*, vol. 199 (Sept. 1958), 100.

Holy Spirit who is also God and not a different God just another separate person still made up of same substance and this Spirit now lives and walks with every single believer. UNTIL the day where the Son/God comes back to earth...on a white horse...and begins his rule over it. That's the Christian message.

Listen, to the world that sounds like folly. And Paul is saying that's kind of the point. You don't come to God through your superior intellect. You come to God, as Paul says, through belief. “Believe” – often gets knocked because its just the thing Christians say when they run out of answers. Hey man “just believe.” Because there is an element where you are placing your faith in something you can't have scientific proof about. Plato explained it like this: we lived our whole life in this room. Made theories about what was beyond the room. But at best they are theories. Factions divide over it. But then, someone opens the ceiling and comes down into our room. Begins to tell us about life beyond the room. You can choose to believe him or not but can you know for sure he's wrong? No. Cause he's been there & u havent. That's Jesus. He's come and told us about the eternity we all long for. But you are going to have to take his word for it. And that's what frustrates some of you. you are like the greeks & jews in v.22...

**[22] For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, [23] but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,**

The two groups in Corinth were Jews and Greeks both of whom could not accept the idea of a crucified Messiah.

Jews had a problem with the crucified Messiah, because they needed a powerful messiah who will establish the proper authority on the earth. And Paul preached weakness. The Greeks are saying, 'no, we want wisdom, we're after philosophical sophisticated reasoning, and you're giving us revelation. Paul said then that, 'only in Christ, the weak Christ, could the Jews get the power they were after. And he showed the Greeks that only in the foolishness of the cross could they get the wisdom that they were searching for. Both power and wisdom were in God but God was not accessed through human strength or wisdom, but through the weakness, humility, and the foolishness of belief.<sup>5</sup>

But they tripped over this stumbling block of the cross.

[24] but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

This connects back to last week. Those who are "called." God, out of his love for us, reveals himself to us and draws us to himself and he saves us from our sin! From our own wisdom. And then he does a little word play in verse 25. This "foolishness" of God is actually far greater than the

---

<sup>5</sup> I believe this comment on strength/weakness foolishness/wisdom around vv 22-23 comes from Keller but I cannot find a citation in my research notes. Nonetheless, it is his style of thought and I would hate not to attribute it in the event that it is.

wisest philosophy of men and this act of weakness by God is far stronger than the greatest of man's attempts at saving himself. See what he's doing? He's lifting the goggles and saying I know it sounds counter intuitive, but if you could just see as God sees, it makes more sense than any other worldview you will read about or come up with.

Then he says...I mean think about it.

[26] For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

Most in the Corinthian church were nobodies. That's who God chose to use to build his church and advance his mission. There were a handful of "somebodies" almost so that God could say no one is excluded. But most in the church were ordinary low class & outcasts. Yet God has revealed truth to them. And through them has shamed the strong. Because for all of their strength they are pathetically weak in what matters. And the wise? Are actually fools because they cannot comprehend the foolishness of God. You tracking? Why did God do it this way?

[29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Now, after several verses of taking us deep, he gets us to his point. The road back to unity...which is his goal...is humility. Humility is the antithesis of pride. And Paul says no human being can boast in the presence of God. How silly. God is the one who saved you, who gave you Christ – the wisdom through which to see the world. So he finishes quoting Jeremiah 9:23-24

[23] Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, [24] but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

What does this mean for us then? Well, when John the Baptist was out...you know...baptizing...Jesus showed up. And when his disciples came to him and said hey John this guy is out baptizing people. That's your gig. And John replied to them no,..."He must increase, but I must decrease." John wanted "john" to fade into the background so that the attention could go to Jesus. This I think is a great

M.O. for how we go to war with pride each day. This two part prayer is something I am trying to pray every day.

### 1. Jesus must increase

What does this mean? The gospel changes what is at the center of our universe. Lots of us operate like we are the sun and Jesus/God is one of the planets in our solar system. We are at the center. For Jesus to increase it means he takes his rightful place at the center and you realize your life is actually orbiting around his. That's what John was doing. He was saying...THERE. There is the power of God. There is salvation. There is God. GO TO HIM! My life is to point to him!

Do you see how freeing this is by the way? Paul doesn't say "don't boast." He just swaps out what we are to boast in. Listen to me some of you have seen yourself as a failure. And if life were about you and you mess up, well then that's it. You are and you should be depressed. BUT, if your life is about Christ...Well then you have something huge to boast in!

Some of you need to share your story because when you messed your life up God intervened and brought you to himself. He saved you. Man I know some stories in our church right now of God restoring broken people and guess what...YOU GET TO BOAST IN THE LORD! Verse 30. Because of him you are in Christ Jesus. You are saved. So make much of Jesus!

Our lives should be signposts pointing to the saving, healing, restoring, reconciling, addiction breaking, hope infusing, life transforming power of Jesus Christ!

Hey that's why we baptize btw. To put YOU under the water. You decrease. But then when you come up you come up identifying with Christ's resurrection. He increases. Your life is a picture of Jesus at that moment. And that's what he calls you to. To make much of Jesus.

HARD Question for you. One that I honestly am still working through ok: What is your life orbiting around? Is it primarily about you and your name or is it about the increase of Christ in your life? It can only be one.

Btw for Jesus to increase in your life, you must get to know him. I cannot implore you enough, to sit down with your bible and spend time meeting him in these pages. When you do, he will start to become the one you want to increase in your life. And only then, when Jesus becomes better to you than anything else, will you be able to sincerely pray the second part of this prayer

- You won't have to hide anymore
- You won't have to try anymore – try to prove yourself

## 2. I must decrease

I promise there is great freedom in this. It's not just that I must decrease, but if Jesus becomes the focal point of my life it means I *can* decrease. Here's what I mean:

**1. You don't have to prove yourself anymore** – Do you know how freeing that is? Our city needs this so bad. The way we try to keep up with the Joneses in this city is deeply saddening. People spend money on cars, homes, plastic surgery, just to be seen as somebody. And deep inside they never feel like they've made it. Still tryin. That's because there is no "made it." EXCEPT IN CHRIST! In Christ you are loved by someone so powerful and so fulfilling you just don't need any other love. So you can decrease in everyone else's eyes. You don't need them. Moms – you can stop trying to be the perfect mom on facebook. I know you measure yourself against other moms. You can release that. Men and Women you can stop polishing your online dating profiles to make you out like the most humble yet accomplished person on earth. Parents you can stop worrying about whether or not your kid is the best athlete (talking to myself) Because your life isn't about living vicariously through your kids! You can just be you. So many of us are still trying to earn your daddy's love...YOU CAN STOP! YOU HAVE IT IN CHRIST! Oh what a relief it is to decrease.

**2. You don't have to hide anymore** – Some of you are carrying dark, secret sin nobody knows about. Listen if your life is orbiting around you, then you gotta keep that hidden because it could destroy everything. But, if your life is orbiting around Christ...He can handle it. He is WAY sturdier than you are. He can handle your sin and he has the power to forgive it, to free you from it, and to restore you! If you decrease, you can confess that sin and finally be free of its weight. Some of you need to do that TODAY.

Last thing I'll say then we gotta wrap up. The point Paul was making was that unity comes when we realize the gospel gives us no room to boast in ourselves but all the room in the world to boast in Christ. This is my hope for Mercy Church.

Nicolaus Zinzendorf in the 1700s said his life's goal was:

**Preach Christ, Die, and Be Forgotten.**

Would we make much of Christ. I'm praying you find a way to boast about Christ this week. I want my legacy, our legacy, not to be about Spence or about Mercy Church. I want there to be a gospel awakening in this city that is carried to the ends of the earth. And its really hard to want that and not secretly want personal success I promise. That's why I have to pray this prayer every day. Jesus must Increase, I must decrease. Let's pray.