

Strengthening the Disciples

June 18 – Acts 18:23-19:7

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Day 169 – 196 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After having spent some time (probably several months) in his home church at Antioch, Paul began his third missionary journey (v.23). He revisited the churches in the Galatian region (Asia Minor) that he had helped to start years earlier. Seeing old friends growing in the faith had to encourage Paul, and his presence had to encourage the Christians there.

As a writer, Luke can say a lot in just a few words. He is also adept at providing a simple leading idea as context for his stories. The leading idea for today's passage is at the tail end of the first verse — **"strengthening the disciples"** (v.23). In this verse, to be strengthened means to buttress, prop, or support in order to build up, affirm, or establish. Luke provided two examples of disciples who were strengthened in Ephesus.

The first disciple strengthened was a man named Apollos (v.24). While Apollos knew and understood the Old Testament scriptures very well, and he was a competent, passionate teacher, "he was only acquainted with the baptism of John" (v.25). In other words, his training was incomplete. He knew that the prophets foretold of the Messiah's arrival, but he did not know that Jesus was the Messiah, much less what He had done.

The Lord used Priscilla and Aquilla to strengthen his understanding by explaining the rest of the story. They probably shared with him the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. While it is not mentioned, it is possible that Apollos believed and became a Christian at that point. **Thus, they put in place supports to affirm Apollos' discipleship and teaching. He was now ready to strengthen other disciples,** for example in Corinth (19:1).

There were other disciples in Ephesus who needed to be strengthened, and that was the purpose of Paul's visit (Acts 19). Upon arrival,

he met twelve men who were also only acquainted with the baptism of John (19:3). John baptized people to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah who would forgive their sins and grant them eternal life (v.4). Thus, Paul explained to them the rest of the story, like what Priscilla and Aquilla had done with Apollos. Once these men believed in Christ, they received the Holy Spirit (v.5-7). **Their faith had been strengthened by Paul's teaching.**

Daily Reflection

As a disciple of Christ, we are constantly learning and growing in spiritual maturity. God uses various means to strengthen our faith. How have you been strengthened as a disciple since believing in Jesus? Who or what has He used to build up or establish your faith?

What is required of you to continue being strengthened as a disciple of Christ?

Paul invested in the lives of Priscilla and Aquilla, strengthening them as disciples. They took time to invest in Apollos and strengthen him as a disciple. Apollos invested in the lives of others to strengthen their faith. **Who are the disciples in whom you are investing to strengthen?**

The Effects of the Gospel

June 19 – Acts 19:8-41

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Day 170 – 195 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul spent three years in the capital city of Ephesus in Asia Minor (*Acts 20:31*), longer than any other location on his journeys. Why so long? During his second missionary journey, Paul promised the Ephesian believers that he would return (*18:20, 21*). He also knew that Ephesus was a very influential location.

Whatever happened there would affect the entire province.

Luke described Paul's time in Ephesus as very impactful. After converting the twelve followers of John (*v.1-7*), he spent three months reasoning with the Jews in the synagogue (*v.8*). However, when they resisted the gospel, Paul taught in a local school to anyone who would listen, Jews and Greeks (*v.9*). After two years, "all who lived in Asia (Roman province) heard the word of the Lord," meaning that **believers were influencing the region** (*v.10*).

Along with Paul's teaching, the Lord used him to perform extraordinary miracles (*v.11, 12*). The demonic stronghold in the area was broken. Individuals were freed from satanic oppression (*v.12*). Those who practiced magic (sorcery and divination) abandoned their ways and burned their books (*v.18, 19*), and the city's idol worship was challenged (*v.23-27*), so much that the economy began to falter.

Of course, with so many positive changes, we would expect the enemy to counterattack, and he did. Luke spent nineteen verses describing the uprising led by a silversmith named Demetrius (*v.23-41*). Ephesus was famous for its worship of Artemis (or Diana). Her temple was the glory of the city and one of the wonders of the ancient world. Tourism was a large part of the Ephesian economy, and silversmiths held a prominent place in society because of the figurines or statues they produced. In short, idolatry was good for business, and Demetrius persuaded others to rebel against Paul, the church, and the spread of the gospel.

One important sidenote is Paul's comment regarding Rome (*v.21*). After he revisited the churches in Macedonia and Greece (planted on his second journey), he wished to return to Jerusalem and then travel to Rome. **Rome, of course, was the capital of the empire, and if the gospel could be planted there, it would affect the Mediterranean world.** Paul could also use Rome as his headquarters for operations into Spain and beyond (*Rom. 15:22-24*). His desire would come to fruition, although perhaps not the way Paul intended.

Daily Reflection

Acts 19 is a perfect example of how the gospel impacts a society. It destroys strongholds, exposes lies, and loosens chains. **As people's lives are changed by the transforming power of the gospel, they in turn change society.**

Therefore, a society's improvement or deterioration is one indicator of how much the gospel is influencing the people there. In light of this gauge, evaluate your community, state, and nation. How much is the gospel affecting the society?

What does your evaluation tell you about the effectiveness of our churches?

Christian Quarrels

June 20 – 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 171 – 194 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned to Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Evidently, while he was in Ephesus (*Acts 19; 1 Cor. 16:8*), he received information from “Chloe’s people” that there were problems in the church there (*v.11*). Thus, Paul penned a letter not only addressing the problems but also offering godly solutions.

After his introduction (*v.1-9*), Paul identified the first issue to be addressed — **church quarrels** (*v.11*). Notice that Paul mentioned Sosthenes (*v.1*), the leader of the synagogue who had been beaten for his part in the spread of the gospel in Corinth (*Acts 18:17*). He must have traveled to Ephesus with Paul.

The premise or foundation of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is found after the introduction in his opening statements, “**There [should] be no divisions among you...**” (*1 Cor. 1:10, 11*).

Despite the success of the gospel in Corinth, the enemy had already sown seeds of discord, and the church was struggling. Paul attempted to sort out their mess and solve their problems.

Unity is vital in any institution or organization. The local church is no exception. Jesus said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand” (*Lk. 11:17*). He also prayed that His followers would “all be one, perfected in unity” (*Jn. 17:11, 21, 22*). **Division is a precursor to destruction.** The adage “divide and conquer” is real, and Satan knows how to instigate division.

The first quarrel Paul addressed regarded baptism, not the doctrine or timing of baptism but the one who did the baptizing. The Corinthians were so competitive that they quarreled over whose baptism was more significant or meaningful (*1 Cor. 1:12*). Paul pointed out the absurdity of this rivalry by stating that none of the baptizers — Paul, Apollos, or Peter — was crucified on our behalf. Only Christ paid our penalty for sin. Therefore, only He is worthy of elevation.

In their immaturity, the Corinthians missed the point. While baptism is important, it takes a back seat to salvation. The gospel is to be our focal point, not baptism. It is true that we’ve all been baptized by different people, but that is unimportant. **We are all saved by one person — Jesus Christ. Therefore, in Him we have common ground. In Him, there is unity; and in Him, we can all agree and be of the same mind** (*v.10, 11*).

Daily Reflection

It is easy to judge the Corinthians for their childish bickering, but **Christian quarrels still exist in the church today**. Most likely, they are in your church as well. What are some of the superficial issues that Christians unfortunately argue and divide over today?

The phrase *Christian quarrels* is an oxymoron, two contradictory words. Explain.

Are you guilty of playing a part in church quarrels? Have you become so adamant about a superficial topic that you’ve lost sight of the big picture? We (Christians) are on the same team, but the enemy has us combating each other. Caution! Division is a precursor to destruction.

The Foolishness of God

June 21 – 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 172 – 193 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We continued reading Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, which addressed issues that had arisen in their church. The first issue he addressed was the division between members over who had baptized them (1:1-17). In our passage today, Paul addressed the Greeks’ love of oratory and wisdom (philosophy). In their eyes, the gospel fell short of both.

Paul admitted that he did not preach Christ with “cleverness of speech” because the Greeks would’ve focused only on his oratorical skills and missed the point of the gospel (v.17; 2:1-5). He also admitted that the gospel is very simple. It is not wrapped in philosophical jargon or lofty imagery. Rather the gospel is centered on the Messiah who was killed by His own people and hung on a shameful cross. In Greek minds, that was not heroic but tragic, and **to believe that Christ could save someone through such inglorious means was a foolish notion.**

Therefore, “to those who are perishing (the lost), the cross of Christ (gospel) is foolish” (1:18). But to those who are saved (that’s us), God used this tragic story to redeem sinners from the penalty of death and offer forgiveness of sin through the sacrificial Lamb (son of God). We understand that the cross of Christ (gospel) illustrates both the power and wisdom of God (v.24). But the unsaved world misses it entirely.

Though the people of the world (i.e., Greeks) believe themselves to be wise, Paul pointed out that their wisdom had not helped them draw closer to God or saved them from their sin (v.21). So then, to believe in their wisdom is foolish (v.20). **Actually, it is the foolishness of God (the gospel) that saves men.** If mankind could be saved by his wisdom or philosophical ideas, then he could boast in the fact that he saved himself apart from God. But “no man may boast before God,” for human wisdom falls short of His glory (v.29). **God saved us through His “foolish” gospel. Let us boast in that (v.31).**

Daily Reflection

The foolishness of God — the cross of Christ — is our salvation. Though the world does not understand it, God has opened our eyes to see it and believe it. “By His doing (not ours), we are in Christ. He is our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption” (v.30). **Let us forsake the wisdom of the world and embrace the foolishness of God!**

Seeking wisdom is not a waste of time; but trusting in wisdom to save you is a waste of time, because it does not lead one to God. Give some examples of how the world trusts in its wisdom to save mankind.

Re-read *1 Corinthians 2:1-5*. What can we learn from Paul about how we should and should not share the gospel with others?

The power of salvation is not in our words or wisdom. Salvation is an act of God that He accomplishes through the work of His Spirit (v.4). Let us, then, set aside our own wisdom and preach the foolishness of God (gospel) and trust the Spirit to save those whom He wills.

The Illuminator

June 22 – 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 173 – 192 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul continued addressing the topics of the wisdom of men and the foolishness of God (see *1:17-2:5*). However, he approached the topic from a different direction, by explaining why the gospel is foolish to the unsaved. If we (Christians) know that the gospel is wise and redemptive, then why doesn't the world see it that way? Why does the world call it foolish? The difference is the Holy Spirit.

Though the Greeks believed that the gospel was foolish, Paul said he spoke wisdom among them (*v.6*). However, it was a wisdom "not of this age" (world), and only the mature could understand it. The word *mature* here means perfect, not as in sinless, but as in more developed or complete. The mature are Christians, those who are complete in Christ. Paul referred to the gospel as a mystery, the hidden wisdom of God that natural (unsaved) men cannot understand (*v.7*).

But why don't they understand it? They lack the illuminating presence of the Holy Spirit. The words and wisdom of God (the gospel) are gibberish to someone without the indwelling Spirit. **Since God is the Author of the words of the Bible, then He must empower men to understand them, and that's one of the roles of the Holy Spirit. He illuminates our understanding like a lamp illuminates a dark room.** Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth" (*Jn. 16:13*). Paul wrote, "We have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, so that we might know the things freely given to us by God" (*1 Cor. 2:12*).

Without the Spirit, the unsaved people of the world do not understand or accept the things of God. Rather they are foolishness to them. But we who have the Spirit can understand the things of God (though not fully). Paul said, "We have the mind of Christ" (*v.16*).

Daily Reflection

Another way to view the Spirit's role is like a radio antenna. There is a continuous stream of invisible waves all around us, and those waves carry important information. However, the only way to tap into that information is with an antenna which transmits the invisible waves into audible communication.

Paul told Timothy that all Scripture was transmitted by God (*2 Tim. 3:16*). Peter concurred and wrote, "No Scripture was an act of human will, but men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God" (*2 Pet. 1:20, 21*). Therefore, it makes sense that **if the Scriptures were written under the influence of the Holy Spirit, then to grasp them fully, they must be read under the influence of the Holy Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit is the primary aide for us to understand the mysteries of God's Word. Without His help, reading the Bible would be like reading a foreign language. We would be able to pick out a word here and there but, overall, it would not make much sense. Without the "antenna" of the Spirit, it would be like trying to catch radio waves with our hands.

Read *Psalms 119:18*. What would be a short, simple prayer before reading God's Word?

What would you tell someone who does not understand the gospel or who does not comprehend what he or she is reading in Scripture? Simply because we have the Spirit, does that mean that all mysteries of the Bible are illuminated for our understanding?

What Will You Have to Show?

June 23 – 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 174 – 191 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After a tangent explaining why the unsaved world cannot understand the things of God (2:6-16), Paul continued to address those who were saved. First, he admonished them for their immaturity and worldliness (3:1-7). Then, he challenged them to think about life through an eternal perspective (v.8-23).

Regarding Paul's admonishment, he told the Corinthians that he could not speak to them as spiritual men, with deep theological truths or solid food, because they were not ready yet (v.1). Instead, he had to speak to them as "men of flesh," babies who needed milk (v.2). If they were fighting about shallow things like the significance of who baptized them, they were unfit for handling the rich truths of the gospel.

Paul also reminded them that Christ is the one who should receive the attention, not him or Apollos or anyone else (v.4, 5). Sure, he and Apollos may have played a small part in their salvation story, but it was God who should receive the credit. "He was causing the growth" (v.6, 7). Besides, Paul wrote, "He who plants, and he who waters are one" (v.8a). Simply put, Paul and Apollos were teammates. "We are God's fellow workers," he said, using our efforts to glorify the Lord (v.9).

Then, Paul shifted his focus to eternal rewards (v.8b). He said that he had shared the gospel with the Corinthians, laying a foundation for their spiritual building (v.10). The foundation was salvation in Christ (v.11). Like them, after salvation, what we build on that foundation is up to us, and our work will be made evident on the day of fiery judgment (v.10, 13). If our efforts were spent pursuing selfish pleasures and worldly wares, they will burn up like wood, hay, or straw, and we will not receive any rewards (v.15). If our efforts were spent for the Lord and His purposes, then they will remain through the fire like gold, silver, and precious stones, and we will be rewarded (v.12, 14).

Daily Reflection

Our judgment will be based on what we did after salvation. If we wasted our time, then we will be saved "as through fire" without rewards (v.15). What have we done with our time, treasure, and talents? Did we use them for ourselves or for the Lord's purposes? What have been our priorities? In what did we invest?

Years ago, the Lord convicted me with this passage. I wrote down these words.

For all the years God's given thee,
With little time to go,
Have you wondered what He'll see?
What will you have to show?

Will wealth be all you've lived here for?
Will health be all you know?
Will you be marked by quests for more?
What will you have to show?

Have you made a difference here?
Have you more seeds to sow?
When death erases all your years,
What will you have to show?

Your deeds will fade along the way.
Your words will melt like snow.
When all you are has passed away,
What will you have to show?

When all is spoken, all is done,
And it's time for you to go,
When heaven's gates are finally won,
What will you have to show?

What will you have to show
When heaven's Judge you meet?
You knew Him as your Savior, though
You hid Him on the street.

Your life with Him, a secret kept,
No one would ever know.
You had one life to live, except
What will you have to show?

A Fool for Christ

June 24 – 1 Corinthians 4:1-21

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Day 175 – 190 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We continued Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians who were spiritually immature. His letter addressed a long list of problems. Already we have learned of their disunity, their fetish with wisdom and oratory, their petty jealousy and strife, and their lack of spiritual discernment. Next, Paul addressed their pride.

Paul wrote, “Now some have become arrogant...” (v.18). In their pride, it seems, they criticized Paul and found nothing in him to admire. In their minds, he was not worthy of their attention or affection (v.3). **He was a fool**, and they viewed themselves as superior, puffed up by their “wisdom.” Thus, Paul admonished them with some harsh words.

First, Paul described who he was and what he had been called to do with his life. For example, he referred to himself as “a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God” (v.1). Servants were the lowliest people in society, and stewards were given great responsibility to oversee and guard someone’s treasure, in this case the gospel. As a steward, Paul had proven to be trustworthy (v.2).

Next, Paul declared that he had a clear conscience, nothing that he was aware of that someone could hold against him (v.4, 5). Even though he was being scrutinized and criticized by the Corinthians, he did not put much stock in their immature opinion of him. Rather Paul said he believed it was more important that the Lord “examine him” and find him blameless (v.4).

Then, Paul tried to paint a picture of what his life was like as an apostle (v.9-13). It was not a glamorous or distinguished position. Rather he was regularly deprived of food, clothing, and shelter. He was hated, slandered, assaulted, and condemned to death. He was the scum of the earth, the least of the least. **He might be a fool in the eyes of the world, but he was a fool for Christ, who was worthy of any hardships.**

In essence, as their spiritual “father,” Paul appealed to the Corinthians to imitate his humility (v.15, 16). They had nothing of which to be proud. Everything they had, related to the gospel, they had received. Their human wisdom and efforts had achieved nothing, but God had been merciful to save them from their sin. Therefore, they had no reason to boast (v.7).

Daily Reflection

There is no room for pride in the Christian life. In fact, some of the Bible’s harshest warnings are against human arrogance. For example, Peter wrote, “God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5). We must always remember that what we have in Christ, related to the gospel, has been given to us. We earn nothing on our own. So then, if we boast, let us boast in what He has done.

But let’s reconsider Paul’s statement, **“We are fools for Christ’s sake”** (v.10). In what sense does Paul mean fool here? What is he saying?

As a Christ-follower, have you ever felt like a fool in the eyes of the world? Explain.

Is it better to be viewed as a fool in the eyes of men or a fool in the eyes of God? If the world calls you a fool, so be it. May you be examined by Him and found worthy as His faithful servant.