

THE DANGEROUS ACT OF WORSHIP

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

1st Corinthians 1.18-2.5

Prepared by Curtis Bronzan
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

I. Introduction to this Study

Throughout our series The Dangerous Act of Worship, we have seen that true, biblical, Spirit-led worship wakes us up to both God's presence within the world and injustices around the world, it clarifies false dangers from real dangers, and it inspires us to live *in* the world without becoming *of* the world.

But to truly get to the heart of worship, we need to think about power. In other words, who is in charge of this dangerous worship? Is it something we can conjure up on our own? Or is it dependent upon God's work in the world? And if so, how are we involved?

II. Connecting with One Another

In 1887, in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, British historian Lord Acton declared, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Reflect upon this statement for a moment. What do you think about it? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

III. Study the Text

- a. Read 1st Corinthians 1.10-13. Luckily these church divisions only occurred in Corinth, in the first century. Never before, never since.

If only!

Where do you see divisions in the worldwide church today? The American church? Between Presbyterian churches? In Good Shepherd?

What could you imagine Paul writing about such divisions? Would you agree with what he might write?!

- b. Read 1st Corinthians 1.14-17.

Why do you think Paul is so concerned with who he baptized in Corinth? Or, to return to the theme of this study, how is baptism related to power?

- c. Read 1st Corinthians 1.18-25.

In verse 18, Paul writes that while some are "perishing", those in the Corinthian church are among those "being saved."

At times, we think of our conversion as a past event, something that happened "back there." How does this verse challenge that perspective?

One commentator puts it this way: "Paul's doctrine of salvation is related *not only* to a fixed, past event, but also explicitly to a present experience and to the future consummation." (my italics) What do you think? Agree? Disagree?

- d. In verse 19, Paul quotes Isaiah 29.13-16. Turn there and read the passage in context.

Does reading this passage in context alter your understanding of what Paul is seeking to communicate? How does it relate to worship?

(Scholars also understand verse 20 to be a quote of Isaiah 33.18, if you'd like to turn there as well)

- e. In verses 20-25, Paul juxtaposes wisdom with foolishness and power with weakness. Try summarizing his thoughts here in your own words (try not to use any of the same words he uses, though!):

- f. Is Paul anti-wisdom, then? Would he disagree with churches teaching doctrine or offering Bible studies? Why – or why not?

- g. How do you understand the statement, "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom"?

In what ways do we "demand signs" or "look for wisdom" today?

Or, from the other angle, how is "preaching Christ crucified" a "stumbling block... and foolishness"?

- h. Reread verse 25 aloud. How could this verse reframe vigorous debates between Christians and non-Christians, where one side is trying to prove the truth of their claims to the other side? (To be clear, I'm not questioning the role of apologetics in the life of faith, just wondering whether it has limits)

- i. Read 1st Corinthians 1.26-31.

Paul is, of course, building an argument here. How do these verses relate to verses 18-25, above? See also Deuteronomy 7.7-9.

- j. In what things are you tempted to boast, other than "in the Lord"?

- k. Read 1st Corinthians 2.1-5.

How is Paul's understanding of his own ministry connected with the wisdom and power of the Lord in 1.18-25 and those who were called in the name of Christ in 1.26-31?

- l. In what ways can our worship rest upon this world's wisdom and power instead of God's foolishness and weakness?

IV. Pray

- a. Pray that Good Shepherd would (continue to) grow in faith through the "foolishness and weakness" of the cross, instead of the "wisdom and power" of the world's truths,
- b. Ask God to guide our community of faith in this time of dismissal from the PC(USA), asking that the Spirit would help us "speak the truth in love" to one another,
- c. Lift up other members of our church family as they come to mind, praying that they would recognize and allow Jesus' power to take hold of their lives.