

St. Andrew Academy

1 Corinthians: You think you've got problems!

Week 2

A Call to Unity in the Community

The Eastern Mediterranean in Paul's Day





Paul opens the letter (1:1-9)

- ❖ Paul's salutation (v. 1-3)
- ❖ Paul gives thanks for the community (v. 4-9)
 - The grace of God – this is about God's freely-given gifts!
 - The eschatological framework of Christian existence
 - The kingdom of God is present-but-coming, already/not yet
 - We are "new creations," "born from above," the ones "on whom the ends of the ages have met."
 - Now is a time of work, preparation, and, yes, even waiting. We wait for the revealing of our Lord (v. 7)
 - God's call to community
 - God has called the Corinthians into "the fellowship (*koinonia*) of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."



Jewish Expectations of the End

THE PRESENT AGE

**THE COMING AGE
(= THE KINGDOM OF GOD)**

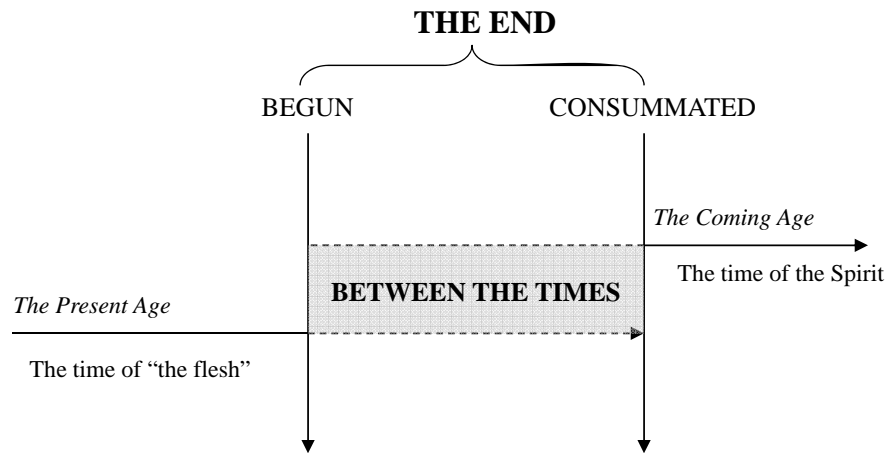
Satan's time
sin
sickness
death
no Spirit

God's time
righteousness
wholeness
resurrection
the Spirit

from *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, by Gordon Fee, 1996



Christians' New Perspective ("already/not yet")



from *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, by Gordon Fee, 1996

©2004 Scott L. Engle

5



Factions in the community (1:10-17)

- ❖ Paul calls the Corinthians to be united, giving up their divisions (*schismata*).
 - Think of this as quarreling factions among the house churches. Those who say they "belong to Christ" are doing so as exclusivists.
 - Paul's words are biting! It seems the Corinthians have even divided over baptism. Paul is glad he didn't baptize any of them! Ouch.
- ❖ For Paul, baptism is of slight importance compared to his proclamation of the gospel.

©2004 Scott L. Engle

6



The foolishness of the cross excludes boasting! (1:18-2:5)

How silly a god to get himself crucified.

- ❖ God's foolishness and human wisdom (1:18-25)
 - What the world sees as foolishness, the message about the cross, is, in truth, the saving power of God.
 - See Isaiah 29:13-14. This is a judgment message!
- ❖ God's calling excludes our boasting (1:26-31)
 - God has called the Corinthians, most of whom weren't rich or powerful. God has done this and there is no room for boasting.
- ❖ Preaching the cross (2:1-5)
 - Paul didn't preach with lofty rhetoric or intricate wisdom (the Greeks loved thinkers of deep thoughts!). Instead, Paul simply preached "Christ and him crucified."



Richard Hay's reflections on 1:18-2:5

- ❖ Paul's message focuses on the cross.
- ❖ Paul's message confronts human boasting.
- ❖ The meaning of "wisdom" is controlled by "Christ crucified."
- ❖ The word of the cross creates a countercultural world for those who are called.
- ❖ The social composition of the church should be a sign of God's choosing of the foolish, the weak, the low, and despised.
- ❖ The OT texts are to be heard as God's word directly to the Christian community.
 - Jesus' story and our own story only make sense within the larger story of God's dealing with Israel.

from Hay's commentary on 1 Corinthians in the *Interpretation* series



Wisdom for the mature (2:6-3:4)

- ❖ God reveals the hidden wisdom of the cross through the Spirit (2:6-16).
 - True wisdom is the wisdom of God. Wisdom is not common sense or street smarts or clever philosophy – it is God’s way, the way that must be revealed to us by God.
 - God had revealed his wisdom to us through the Spirit. It seems like foolishness to the natural mind, but Christians have the mind (the Spirit) of Christ.
- ❖ People of the flesh (3:1-4)
 - If the Corinthians were really mature in the wisdom of God, they would be united in love – not divided.
- ❖ The lesson – avoid spiritual elitism. What does it mean to “have the mind of Christ”? See Philippians 2:1-13.



The community and its leaders belong to God (3:5-23)

- ❖ Paul and Apollos as God’s field hands (v.5-9)
 - We are all servants working together to build God’s church.
- ❖ Our construction work will be tested by fire (v.10-15),
 - Are we building well? This passage is about the “structural integrity of our construction work.” We are accountable for how well we build.
- ❖ The church as God’s temple (v.16-17)
 - The church is God’s temple, indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit, who is the God’s presence in and among his people.
 - We are not God’s temple because of what we do, but because the Holy Spirit is present in our community.
- ❖ Paul’s summary – All belongs to God (v.18-23)
 - We and all creation are God’s. It is that simple and that revolutionary.



Paul confronts the boasters (4:1-21)

- ❖ Servants are to be judged only by their Lord (v.1-5)
 - Paul doesn't care about 'votes,' he cares only about pleasing God, who alone judges him.
- ❖ Puffed-up Corinthians v. the suffering apostle (v.6-13)
 - Verse 6 is key; it is where Paul has been heading. Going beyond the witness of Scripture would mean relying on human wisdom.
 - These verses shatter any illusions that there is a "health & wealth gospel."
- ❖ Paul delivers a fatherly admonition to his Corinthian children. (v.14-17)
 - Paul founded this community. He is their father. They should imitate him as children imitate their parents.
- ❖ A final warning to the boasters (v.18-21)
 - Will it be the stick or will it be gentleness? They can choose.



New Testament Timeline

