



FAITH
COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH

Gospel Atmosphere

I CORINTHIANS



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Well today we finally return to our series! And it's been almost a month since we've been in Corinthians so we need to reinsert ourself into the flow of thought here. So if you remember, Paul is writing this book from Ephesus and he's heard about what's been churning off the rumor mill. There were some rumblings going

around about who was the better teacher. They were proud about who they followed on twitter. I follow Paul. I follow Apollos. I follow Cephas.

There were cults of personality. And as always happens, jealousy and strife and division was the result. And Paul gets wind of this and says, "Listen I see that there are quarrels among you." And those quarrels have nothing to do with the quality of teaching or even the content of teaching. They have nothing to do with the GOSPEL. They are stemming from a messed up understanding of wisdom and power.

You are building little personality cults around people who you think are powerful or wise by worldly standards.

And then he launches into this extended section that tries to get at the nature of true wisdom and true power. He helps us to see that power is found in surrender, strength is to be found in submission, wisdom is to be found in weakness.

Men are not the source of true power and wisdom. They can never be. Men are just cardboard signs that point to the true source.

So chapter 1 and 2 are all about disenchanting them from the wisdom of men and disillusioning them from the power of men.

But the question remains, if men do not belong in the roll of wisdom dispensers then what roll do they have? Paul answers this question by way of three analogies all of which communicate slightly different things.

First, he compares Paul and Apollos to tools in a field. We are like

rakes and shovels and watering buckets that plant seed and water, but God gives the growth.

This garden analogy is trying to remind us that people are merely tools in God's hand. Paul plants a radish. Apollos takes a hose. But God both designs and empowers the miracle of DNA replication where the double helix chain of nucleotides, unfolds, is copied by the RNA messengers and through a complex process of cellular proofreading, error-checking copying, proteins are folded and create new cells. That's God. I've got a hose.

So that's the first analogy.

There's a second analogy where he compares us to workers building a structure. Here the focus is on design. We are the workers, but God is the engineer and architect. We are the minimum wage employees right out of high school with zero experience. God is the seasoned architect with beam deflection calculators and AutoCAD. We've got to build his church on the one foundation of Jesus Christ. It can't be built on the foundation of men's wisdom or the charisma of personality or on gimmicks. It must be built on Jesus Christ.

And now this final analogy he's going to compare us to bricks in a temple and he is going to use this to describe the seriousness of what happens when we look at ministry results and credit people rather than God.

So let's take a look at this third analogy.

1 Corinthians 3:16-23, Do *you* not know that *you* are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in *you*?

Now here he says, the church of Jesus Christ collectively makes up the temple of God. And just to be clear in the Greek that you, do YOU not know that YOU are God's temple. That's a plural. In English it's not clear. It could be you individually or you all. But there's not ambiguity in the Greek. You plural, You all, God's children as a whole represent the temple of God.

Now further he says that temple is holy. That is a concept we really struggle conceptualize in our culture. I listened recently to a message by a preacher where he was talking about just imagining being in the presence of a temple filled by God. And it really got me thinking about this point. I went back and read the account in Kings and it got me fired up.

Think about it. Imagine all of us as Israelites and we are standing around looking at Solomon's temple. This thing took 20 years to build and maybe you've been part of the chiseling of rocks out the quarry or maybe you were involved in sewing linens or whatever.

And now it's almost done and you are getting really excited, but in the back of your mind you are wondering, is God really going to be in there? In 2 Chronicles 5:1 it talks about move in day. Maybe you've built a house and you can relate to this. It's perfectly finished and it's just waiting for your furniture. That's how 2 Chronicles 5:1 opens up. They haul out all the things that have been in storage. Everything his father David had prepared, and they move it into place. They move in the candlesticks and the table for the showbread. The priests move the ark into place. They did it with all kind of reverence. They learned their lesson from Uzzah. It must have been an exciting day, right?

But is God there?

And then out came the choir and they started singing along with the trumpeters "whose duty it was to make themselves heard in unison of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord." There's a whole theology of worship in that verse. And do you want to know what happened?

The entire temple began to be filled with a thick cloud.

Something is happening. And what is that something? What does that thick cloud and smoke represent? In Rev 15 we are told that this smoky cloud was a byproduct of being in proximity to the glory of God and the power of God. This is speaking of another time when the temple was filled.

Revelation 15:8, and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary.

What's the point? Smoke means incredible power is at hand. Now, imagine being in the engine room on a battleship or an aircraft carrier and all the sudden it starts to smoke. What's your emotional state. That just elicits raw fear. Why? Because down there in that engine room there's some serious power/energy and the smoke means that power is ready to shift phases. It's fine when it's all contained, but when it starts to interact with you personally, you start to fear. The smoke is the indicator that raw power is near.

Solomon dedicates the temple with a sacrifice and then that power is unleashed. I want you to imagine this next scene.

2 Chronicles 7:1-3, As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

Now why go through all that effort to describe a holy temple? Because that's what Paul wants us to have in mind. We collectively as a church are God's temple. Now the text goes on to say:

If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Now here's the point. Can you imagine at that moment with the

temple filled with smoke, and you're literally on your face just worshiping and trembling because there is so much power and so much glory contained in it can you imagine driving up to the temple with a giant wrecking ball crane and deciding to just start pulverizing the stones?

That's what this passage says we are like when we create factions and divisions in his church. That's a pretty serious deal.

Now let me ask you an equally serious question: are you guilty of being a wrecking ball in God's church? Now in order to answer that question you have to know what divisive action Paul has in mind. Think back over the text of 1 Corinthians. What action of destruction specifically does Paul say is like a wrecking ball swung into the side of a temple?

We'll look back to 1:12. I follow Paul, I follow Apollos. Look 3:4, I follow Paul, I follow Apollos. What is driving all this caustic speech? Attitudes of jealousy and strife. These are the actions that cause divisions.

The worst kind of division in the church comes from jealousy and strife and particularly the kind where we compare ourselves with other churches and rejoice over our superiority. The worst kind of factions in the church are where we chip, chip, chip on others never extending grace, always critical.

It's so damaging because you use the weight of your reputation to ruin someone else's.

Have you ever had someone say to you, "Okay, now I know you are the new guy. You see that guy over there. Watch out for him. He's

always trying to get his way."

Doesn't that just taint and poison you? When we do that kind of thing in the body of Christ it is poison. Here's five reasons this author should never be trusted. That's the language of a wrecking ball.

I find myself tempted to do this at times - and forget being tempted, I just flat out do it. It makes me feel good to look at another ministry, to look at another pastor and come up with 5 ways we do things better. Here are 12 reasons why I am more in touch with reality than this guy. That is wrecking ball behavior and especially, certainly, absolutely when those thoughts translate into words that I say to someone else.

Being critical is factious. I can assure you of this based on my experience as a husband and father. Criticism tears down the family. So why do we do it? There's a reason and it's not cool.

When I poke, probe, needle at people in my family, I do it because in a twisted way, it makes me feel good. I have a thousand reasons I've told myself as to why I do it, but there's one real reason I ignore. I have this insatiable need to prove to myself that I am better. Pointing out faults in others is validation of my own superiority.

What a sick twisted heart, and I want to repent of that. That applies on a personal level and a church level.

An objection

Now I know some of you are thinking, "Well, don't we sometimes need to warn people?"

Wasn't Jesus divisive and critical? Being critical isn't always bad. We talk about critical thinking. Doesn't the mere fact that truth exists and it confronts our natural inclinations mean that we are going to offend and divide? What's the difference between divisive and discerning? Are we supposed to be unified with people who peddle error as truth? I mean doesn't God want us to divide when we find ourselves wildly diverging on important issues like LGBT or inerrancy or something like this? When God's commands are trampled what are we supposed to do?

Doesn't Paul himself call out individuals. Doesn't Paul in 2 Tim 2:17 call out Hymenaeus and Philetus and say, "Have nothing to do with these guys." Aren't these the words of a wrecking-ball?

Well for the remainder of this message here's what we are going to try and do: We want to compare the spirit of a grace-filled truth teller with the spirit of self-righteous critical wrecking ball. And I hope that will provide some clarity. And just so we don't get too black and white, at all times you are likely both.

So we will organize our thoughts under this heading.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WRECKING BALLS

1. Wrecking Balls are objects of destruction

Objects of Destruction

Now this is a bit of a play on words because a wrecking ball is an object of destruction in that it destroys things but it is also an object of destruction in that it will be destroyed by God himself.

1 Corinthians 3:17, If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Now that is frightening language. And I don't want to just breeze over that. God promises to destroy those who destroy his temple. If someone came and started breaking out windows of your house with a poulaski would you just stand by? In Ephesians God compares the church to his bride. If on your wedding day someone takes the cake knife and charges your bride would you stand idly by? You defend that which you love and God makes a bit of a promise here: I will destroy those people that attack my house, my bride.

Now this sounds like a really serious deal, poulaskis through windows and wrecking balls and knife-wielders attacking brides. And while it is exactly this serious in terms of the damage inflicted, its form in real life is by comparison innocuous, can lack drama, can even be cloaked in spirituality.

You see there is an invisible weapon that Paul is speaking against. What is that super dangerous, divisive, destructive, wrecking-ball force upon which Paul's strong language rests? Words!

- Words that slant.
- Words that prejudice.
- Words that manipulate.
- Words that are spoken in private.
- Words that gather groups against people.
- Words that act like cancer.
- Words that stir up suspicion about motives
- Words that are caustic in nature.
- Words that air your preference in condemning sorts of ways.

God says, he will destroy people like that. Now I have a question in my mind at this point - is this referring to eternal destruction reserved for unbelievers or is there a kind of destruction that God reserves for believers who destroy his church?

I think we can easily make an argument that it is speaking of both. When the word destruction is used in the Bible to describe an action of God against men it can refer both to unbelievers and believers.

Let me demonstrate this quickly. In 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Speaking of unbelievers who willingly inflict injury upon God's church - in other words, those who persecute the church, God says,

2 Thessalonians 1:9, They will suffer the punishment of eternal *destruction*, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

There are certain people who are outside the body of Christ and try to destroy the body of Christ. They intentionally persecute believers. There are unbelievers who are wrecking balls. And God will destroy these people eternally. So in that case the word destruction means hell.

But then there are others who are part of the church and not just part of the church in the sense that they attend on Sunday morning but they are actually blood-bought children of God who happen to also be divisive because their flesh is controlling them. They are divisive because their minds are warped by sin even though they are

redeemed children of God. And God will destroy these people in a different sort of way.

Let me demonstrate this. We are going to get to 1 Corinthians 5 where Paul is going to confront sexual immorality. In the church at Corinth there was an incestuous relationship going on in the church and it was out in the open. Not only did everyone know about it, they were in fact proud of their progressive non-judgmental church and Paul recommends this course of action. He says,

1 Corinthians 5:5, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the *destruction* of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

This is a believer. Right? Unbelievers are not saved in the day of the Lord. This is talking about a guy in the church who is causing division, and he's causing division because he is being controlled by the flesh. He's promoting and proud of immorality and here we have an example of a man being DESTROYED in the flesh to stop his wrecking-ball behavior in the church.

Now the reason I say this is just to warn you that just because you

are a Christian does not make you exempt from God's anger and destruction. If you start going around destroying his precious bride with your tongue, it's open season. And when God takes aim, he never misses.

Now if that is not frightening to you, this next point ought to terrify you. Not only are wrecking balls objects of destruction.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WRECKING BALLS

1. Wrecking Balls are objects of destruction
2. Wrecking Balls are deceivers of self

Deceivers of Self

Look at how verse 18 begins, "Let no one deceive himself"

Let no one deceive himself.

It's just so critical for everyone here to listen. If you don't think of yourself as divisive be super careful, you may be the exact person in view. Why? Because the text is saying that divisive people are self-deceived. You may be deceiving yourself that this does not apply to you.

You may be far more divisive than you realize. We all have some arrogant punk in mind who spouts off at the mouth and seems oblivious the damage he's wrought. And of course this text has something to say to that guy, but God has in mind here anyone whose mouth destroys his bride:

- the shy, quiet introverted gossip,
- the critical spouse who poisons the family,
- the cynical, hair-splitting, sarcastic theologian,
- the arrogant princess.
- the pious, self-righteous teenage girl

So be careful that you don't too quickly excuse yourself from this

criticism. Don't be self-deceived. Now what does that mean? What does it mean to say, "Don't deceive yourself." Isn't that impossible. If you are deceived, doesn't that by definition mean you couldn't help it. Nobody is willingly deceived? Right?

Actually, we are willingly deceived all the time. Whose doing the deceiving here? We are deceiving ourselves. We very often say to ourselves. We have this internal conversation. "Mmmmm..you know my words sound really critical. I can tell that I inflicted some damage there. That doesn't look good. Now what can I say here to make this sound better. Let's come up with something to latch onto that sounds true but we know isn't."

We do this sort of thing when we have a sense in our spirit that what we are doing is wrong or we get a sense that we might be wrong about something or we have a sense that we should be doing something but we can't get ourself to do it.

And then in order to get around the obvious fact in front of us, we tell ourselves something that sounds good. We deceive ourselves.

And in the case of causing factions and divisions in the church what lie do we tell ourselves? What form does self-deception take when wrecking balls look at the damage they've done and that tinge of conscience strikes them and says, "Maybe you shouldn't have swung that wrecking ball into the holy of holies." What rationalization, justification, self-deception arises in the heart at that moment?

Well, they needed to hear the truth. Who else was going to tell them?

Truth telling is going to have some inevitable fall-out. I need to say

something true and these poor people who can't accept the truth, they get wounded and run away. I can't help that.

It's our job as Christians to confront error and I can't help it if they run away.

Divisive people tend to love truth but have

- so little grace,
- so little nuance,
- so little patience,
- so quick to condemn,
- so angry,
- so certain that they are right,
- so little appreciation for other valid perspectives.

Listen, You and I have seen this play out a hundred times in our lives. Someone comes in and strongly voices his opinion about something he doesn't like.

Let me give one example here. And I know in saying this I risk offending but please hear me out all the way.

I've heard people and perhaps you've heard people say in a very critical way, "I'm so sick of worship songs that use the words I and me in them. Man, just listen to all this man-centered theology that just pollutes the air."

And what I have seen from this is judgmental attitudes, self-righteous glances, folded arms and wide swaths of criticism that come not only from the guy who said those words, but from the people who heard him say those words.

When that wrecking ball comes swinging into the temple, here's how the damage happens. They hear those critical words spoken from this strong personality and they think, "Wow, that's a good point. I've never thought about that. And he said it with such conviction. I've never had any conviction on that point. And then a fear arises in the heart. I'd better take a stand with him lest I be condemned. Apparently this is a mark of orthodoxy that I had never considered. If I too start condemning this movement then I will be viewed as orthodox."

That is wrecking-ball language because it confuses external conformity to standard with heart transformation. Are we a narcissistic culture? Are we focused on self? Of course we are. Does this need to be addressed? Absolutely. Is there a point to be made if 100 percent of the song selections are in the first person? I think that's a great observation.

But are songs written in the first person wrong? There is absolutely no way you can make that argument from the Bible. In fact the Bible argues very strongly the other direction. If the Psalms are to be our example in worship, the psalms contain 1824 1st personal pronouns (I, me, my). That averages out to 12 times per Psalm. It seems to me that God WANTS us to sing in the first person because he wants the reality of who he is to move our own affections. He wants a response from us.

That doesn't mean we don't address narcissism. The reason this kind of language is so damaging in the church is because it causes us to focus on the form not heart. It draws unnecessary lines in the sand and says, I am better than you because I do this external thing better than you do. It creates standards of orthodoxy that God knows nothing of. All from a casual comment swung around.

Listen, we need to address sin, we need to speak truth in love, but it needs to be done with so much more WISDOM. There's a remedy recommended here for those of us who recognize that we have been deceiving ourselves.

And that's what Paul continues on to say.

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise [meaning he has some insight into his self-deception, he thinks he is better than other] in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

In the context here the Corinthians thought they knew what the church needed. The church needs to sound a bit more intelligent. The church needs to be a bit more progressive.

The church needs one thing and one thing only, that is the person of

Jesus Christ. The gospel is terrifyingly simple. You just have to admit your bad and you need Jesus to fix you. That sounds like you are two years old. Haven't you grown up? Can't you say that in a way that sounds a little more academic?

Let the wise in this age become fools that they may become wise.

What's the surest way to build unity in the church? Become a fool. See your own wretchedness. Because then as you need to correct error, it will not be from your loft perch of superiority.

You will grab the hand of the guy next to you and say from conviction, I am telling you my friend, I am a fool. And it's not the obligatory false-humility, it's conviction man, we need Christ. Let's run after him together.

It's so easy to pit one another against each other. It actually makes for a great teaching tool. Any teacher will tell you that comparison is one of the best ways to teach. Well you see at my last church, we did this. But here's how we do it (implied the right, better way). Churches these days do this. Lame pastors these days do this. Do you see how it creates an elitist mindset? Do you see how that is the opposite of becoming a fool. Yes, the church (ours chief among them) has real problems that need addressing but we do it holding out our hands in our bankruptcy, in our foolishness.

And it is then that we become wise - because the wisest thing to do is admit reality which is that we are fools. If you are out of gas, the wisest thing to do is admit it and start asking for gas.

So wrecking balls are objects of destruction, deceivers of self and finally we see here that wrecking balls are respecters of men.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WRECKING BALLS

1. Wrecking Balls are objects of destruction
2. Wrecking Balls are deceivers of self
3. Wrecking Balls are respecters of men

Okay so let's see this in the text.

So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future-all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Okay, so the command here is to not boast in men. In other words, don't latch onto a guy as if some human has the corner on the market.

But instead he says, "all things are yours." What does he mean by that. I think he means by that, that as a Christian you can listen with discernment and appreciate the different perspectives that exist.

You can think critically without being critical. We should be able to learn from other perspectives.

One of the things I love about the body of Christ is that no man can do it all. One man can speak in a way that another can't and if the other tried to speak that way, it would feel forced and fall flat and be completely ineffective. We absolutely need one another. Last week the Woods got up and gave a testimony about God's faithfulness in the life of their grandson. What an amazing story. Neither Nate or I could do that. When I preach, when Jim Stout preaches, when Nate preaches or Brian or Matt or David or Ben or Kelly or whoever we all bring something unique. God takes our unique failures, our unique giftedness, our unique personalities and speaks to us uniquely. And that is why it is dangerous to latch onto a single individual. That's why Paul says, they are all yours. Paul is yours. Learn from him. Apollos is yours. Learn from him. But don't you dare pit them against one another saying he is better than him for this reason. Don't you dare say that mouths are better than ears but eyes are better than both. Well, I don't know about you, but I want all of them. You are incomplete without them.

You see, without the full body of Christ weighing in, we become starved. We become myopic. I heard a sermon a long time ago that said it something like this (I can't remember exactly)

"Read and study one man and you will be a clone." "Read and study 10 men and you will be a groupie." "Read and study 100 men across centuries and continents and you will find your own voice

and be that unique contributor to the body of Christ."

Why because God uses all those voices to speak to you across the breadth of the human experience. The fresh winds of other cultures will blow away the fog.

No man has all the truth. Let us become humble enough to admit that.

Let us become fools that we may become wise.

Application: Repentance from being Critical or Divisive.

Now I want to end in a time of application. Being critical with your mouth is a serious deal. But as you probably know, it's not easy to be delivered from the spirit of criticism. In fact, it's impossible. So just like we would pray for a supernatural work of God to heal us from cancer or heal us from some physical deformity, we need the Spirit of God to heal us from the attitudes of criticism and superiority that destroy the relationships within the church.

Perhaps this message has made you realize that you have inflicted damage upon God's temple with some words you have spoken. Perhaps you came here self-deceived, but God has softened you to see.

We are going to take a moment to repent of that. I'm going to give you a choice. I'm going to give you about three minutes to pray. Maybe the best thing to do is pray by yourself and just ask for forgiveness. But let me challenge you. Perhaps the best thing to do is involve the person next to you. Maybe it's your spouse, maybe it's

a stranger. All things are yours, whether it be Apollos or Peter or Nate or the stranger next to you. James talks about confessing your sins to one another. But not just for that reasons.

James 5:16, Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

It doesn't say, confess your sins to the pastor or priest. It says, one another. Why? So they can pray for you that you can be healed. Maybe the best thing is to involve the Apollos or Paul next to you to pray for your healing.

Let's take a moment to pray and I'll close us in a few minutes.

If you want to continue in that season of prayer, there will be people up here to your left.