

1Corinthians 18-01-07a

This is the 7th of January 2018 and we continue our study in the book of 1st Corinthians resuming in chapter 2. Let's take a moment as we always do to pause and reflect on the necessity for God the Holy Spirit to be our teacher and our enabler. The things that we look at from God's word are too much for our little human hamster running around in his wheel in our brain without the supernatural power that comes from God's Spirit. So we remember that that is necessary both in the delivery and then in the reception of God's truth and we'll ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study.

Shall we pray? Father we're so grateful for the many ways that you bless us and provide for us, the areas in which you challenge us to give us opportunities for faith and to grow in your grace and in knowledge of the Lord Jesus. We thank you for the opportunity we have this morning to be nourished and strengthened and encouraged from this portion of your word and we ask your blessing on us as we study together. May each one find in it renewed enthusiasm and renewed appreciation for our Savior, our salvation and the wonderful hope that we have before us both in this life and in the ages to come.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. You remember of course that Paul had come to Corinth and established this group a couple of years previous to the writing of the letter and if you turn to Acts chapter 18, let's just refresh our minds on that history.

It was certainly in the minds of the people who were receiving this letter from the Apostle and it's worth reviewing because it sheds some light especially on a couple of the things that Paul says this morning. So when it says after these things in Acts chapter 18 verse 1, there are a lot of things and he has been in Thessalonica and has been sent away and Paul has been at the Areopagus and talking about the monument to the unknown God and in verse 33 of chapter 17, he has departed from among them. Some men joined him and believed among them Dionysus the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris and others with him.

After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth and he found a certain Jew named Aquila born in Pontus who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome and he came to them. So because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked for by occupation they were tent makers and he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, every Saturday and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.

But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, Your blood be upon your own heads. I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.

He departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshipped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the

synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized. Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you, for I have many people in this city.

And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. When Galileo was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law. When Paul was about to open his mouth, Galileo said to the Jews, If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you.

But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves, for I do not want to be a judge of such matters. And he drove them from before the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat.

Galileo took no notice of these things. So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria.

Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cancria, for he had taken a vow. So that's the background, the founding of the group.

We saw it when we first began the letter, but it's been several weeks ago. And some of these details pertain in what we're now going to see as we turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 2. You remember in chapter 1, we had the greeting. He notes that people from Chloe's household have informed him about contentions, that it is creating divisions in that group, and they seem to be dividing along lines of various speakers, whether it's Paul or Apollos or Christ.

And the issue of baptism has come and gone. And he says in verse 18, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. Now, the power of God.

This is a subject that Paul has spent the first chapter working his way around to, and he is going to develop it in this second chapter, the power of God. So stop and think now. Here's the apostle Paul.

This is the age of apostolic spread of the gospel. The apostles began with the Lord Jesus breathing the spirit on the 11. Later on, he encounters Paul on the, I shouldn't say encounter, I should say confronts Paul on the road to Damascus and commissions him to be the born out of time 12th apostle.

And the Holy Spirit comes on him as well. And so what is the source of the power? Remember when the Simon, the sorcerer tries to buy it with money? What's he trying to get? Give me this Holy Spirit, right? So when we talk about power, we're talking about the Holy Spirit. We, I believe that the Lord Jesus performed his miracles.

The by God's Holy Spirit. It is by the spirit that the world was created. You can't get through two or three verses in Genesis without seeing God's Holy Spirit.

This is the power. So when we talk about the power of God, what are we talking about? The Holy Spirit of God. Now we've got a little memory aid for ourselves.

How does the power of God come into the life of the believer? Two elements like epoxy. What are they? The word of God and the spirit of God. The word is the guidance and the information.

God, the Holy Spirit provides the what? Power. Undirected power. I was watching a thing about Hubble.

They have a documentary running this month on, I guess it's the 25th anniversary of Hubble or whatever. And so they were talking about its incredible significance in terms of the information that it has been able to provide, being outside the atmosphere, seeing all the, we really, it's amazing. We just take for granted that we know about other galaxies and so on.

But up until recent years, science thought the Milky Way was the universe and the galaxy was the universe. And it's been within the living memory of some of the older ones of us where they suddenly discovered there are other galaxies like the Milky Way. And only in recent times with the Hubble had they been able to tell just how many there are.

And there are gobs of them. There are a lot of them. I think they were saying something along the lines of, if you looked through a soda straw, the part of the sky that would be circumscribed by a soda straw, there's like 10,000 galaxies.

And in each of those, there's 10 billion stars. I don't remember all the details, but it's a lot. So they were trying to get up into space and go to the moon and get above the atmosphere and try to find some of this stuff out.

And so they showed that reel of rockets trying to go up and they explode on the pad. They go like bottle rockets. I remember one where it's supposed to take off and the top pops off and a parachute comes out and the nose cone tumbles to the ground.

The parachute doesn't even have time to open. And there is a lot of, this is my point, but I got distracted. There's a lot of power in those rockets, but it has to be guided.

Raw, undirected power is usually a bad thing. Think hurricane, typhoon, tornado, lots of power, but it's not focused. It's not directed toward a constructive goal.

It's usually a destructive event. Earthquakes, undirected, unpurposefully guided power is a bad thing. So not only is the spirit of God providing God's power, but the word of God helps us and helps God direct it in our lives.

So the word of God and the spirit of God, but our subject is the power of God. It's Paul's subject. And you see this throughout his letters.

Halfway through the first chapter of Romans, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is what? The power of God with a view toward salvation. I'm not ashamed of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. What is he talking about here in verse 18 chapter one? The message of the cross, foolishness of those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

Don't lose track of where the power is. We know where it is. We know where it comes from, but it also is directed and it has a purpose.

And that purpose varies based on historical context, based on the people involved, based on what God's particular unfolding plan is. So there is power and there is the word of God describing it, focusing it, helping us to understand it, but it's not always the same. For example, we are not the children of Israel enslaved in Egypt at the moment, are we? The power of God was focused in the nine plus one plagues on delivering his people from Egypt.

So that is a manifestation of God's power. There's plenty of God's word around it. Moses is announcing ahead of time and communicating freely to the people and to Pharaoh that this is the power of God and here is why.

Let my people go. That's not always the focus and the direction of God's power, but it is certainly emblematic of salvation and deliverance out of bondage and slavery to sin. Well, to us who are being delivered, being saved, it is the power of God.

What kind of power do we need? It's going to be based on what kind of being saved we're talking about, right? Are we constantly losing our salvation and needing to once again be born again? Of course not. So what is he going to talk about? I'll destroy the wisdom of the wise, I'll bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent of this age. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of this world? Now, why would the wisdom and the debates and all of this be foolish? Because the purposes of man, the plans of man, the goals and objectives that we think would make life wonderful are not usually God's.

You look at the entertainment industry, what is their goal? You look at much of the profit sector, what is their goal? It is seldom, let's do whatever we can to appreciate and glorify God and appreciate and glorify the Lord Jesus. It is usually something much more self-centered and short term, right? It doesn't necessarily have a view toward eternal life. There can certainly be believers who are involved in efforts who, in their way and in their efforts, dedicate their time and their talents to God in whatever sector.

But by and large, the wisdom of this age, financial success, professional accomplishment, and so on, are falling well short of the glory of God. We all sin and fall short of that glory. So, in the wisdom of God, the world, through wisdom, doesn't know God.

And this is the great obstacle, in my view, for your atheists and agnostics and those who are

carpers and critics of Christian faith in general and God and the Lord Jesus in particular, is they want a God that will be the genie of the lamp for these worldly and human-minded goals. Well, I want to live in a bed of roses. I want all of my dreams to come true.

I want to be fulfilled in my own way and in my own time. Jews request a sign. Greeks seek after wisdom.

In verse 22, these are the two primary areas. The Jews want a sign, but when they see signs, they're not happy. Why? Because the signs they get are not the ones they want.

They want power. Signs are a manifestation of power, right? But they want that power to satisfy them. So, when Jesus feeds the multitude, then he puts his disciples in the boat and starts sending them across the sea, the people are trying to make him king.

Give us this bread always, right? Why? Your power can be used to accomplish my goal. I'm tired of grinding wheat. I'm tired of working for others and grinding under the Romans.

You be the king and you feed us. It's wanting to direct the power of God to human ends, and we really have to be careful. And this is what Paul is going to be warning the Corinthians about in a very elegant and understated way.

The Jews are seeking a sign. The Greeks want wisdom. Why would the Greeks want wisdom? Why do we want wisdom? Why do we Google things? That's wisdom now.

My source of conventional, earthly, practical wisdom is Google. I am one of the best people on the planet at getting Google to find me what I want to know. I use it every day, all day.

There's not a day where I am not, because of my employment and because of my hobbies and because of my necessities, I am always on that thing. It is the world's biggest library of information, and I am in there reveling in it all the time. But I am here to tell you, I am usually accomplishing short-term goals with it, and it only counts on eternal life if the effort in which I am using that information is, in the larger context, done as unto the Lord.

I want to be a good steward of things that God has given me. If one breaks, I want to try to fix it so that I don't have to spend God's money buying another one. I can assist someone who has a need, and I can use my hands and my eyes to make something go, but I want to do that as unto the Lord.

If the Lord Jesus had a broken Blu-ray player, would I fix it for him if he asked me to? Absolutely. I would do the best possible job, not because I just want the Blu-ray player to work, but because I want to be pleasing in the Lord's sight. We have to constantly back up and say, when I am using wisdom and when I am directing power, because we are believers, it needs to be in the larger context of service.

You can do mundane things, but they have got to be set in our spirit and in our soul in the

context of reflecting the glory of God as those who are faithful stewards of time, talent, opportunity, resources, and so on. To the extent that we forget that, we are in the wood, hay, and stubble arena. So, Jews request a sign, Greeks seek after wisdom.

Now, keep your finger here and turn back to Acts chapter 18 once again. You'll want to stick a piece of paper or something in each of these because we are going to flip back and forth here just a little bit. This is the context.

We know, unlike some letters of Paul, we know a bit more about this situation than usual. So, he says that Jews request a sign and Greeks seek after wisdom. What does it say in chapter 18 of Acts verse 4? Every Saturday he went down to the synagogue and persuaded who? Both Jews and Greeks.

He is very familiar. He did this for a year and a half. Think about something recently that you did for 18 months.

Think back 18 months. We're right at the beginning of the year, so this would put us back. This is January 2018, so 2017.

This would be like July of 2016. Is there something that's been going on since July of 2016? It's a pretty long time ago, right? That's how long Paul spent in Corinth talking to both Jews and Greeks. So, he knows their predilections.

He knows their debate points. He knows their questions. He knows their concerns.

He knows their desires. And when he says the Jews are looking for power to be manifested, why do they want to see this power? What is he trying to persuade them of? Well, keep reading in 18. When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, and it says Paul was compelled by the Spirit, but if you've got a New King James there, there's a text note on verse 5. It says they're not sure if it's in his Spirit or in the Spirit.

This is going to be his Spirit, because if you look at the Greek here in verse 4, Paul has a bit of a change of focus, a change of emphasis, and it is triggered. Why do we have the information given when Silas and Timothy come from Macedonia? Now, Timothy is like an ideal symbolic guy, because his mother is Jewish and his father's a Greek, right? So, they come from Macedonia, and when they arrive, it says suddenly Paul devoted himself fully to the Word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. Now, what does this mean when he says devoted himself fully? Why is there such a difference here in that translation and your New King James? It says when from Macedonia Silas and Timothy came, Paul was occupied.

This is soon echo. Echo is to have or to hold, soon is with. So, it means to not just have something, but you're occupied, you're focused, you turn all of your attention to a thing.

So, occupied with the Word. There is no word here for Spirit. The word Spirit is not in your Greek text.

It says when from Macedonia came Silas and Timothy, occupied with the Word was Paul, earnestly testifying, and this is *dia martyreo*. *Dia* means through, martyr, *martyreo*. This is a witness, someone who testifies.

Martyreo means to bear witness, to give testimony. You give it through, so he's fully occupied with giving testimony to the Jews. Notice the Greeks have kind of dropped out of the picture.

What happened? He's been there for a period of time. Timothy and Silas show up and Paul suddenly just gets obsessed with convincing the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. It says Christ, right? How many apostles are there? A little pop quiz here.

How many apostles are there? Twelve. If I had said disciples, it would be a more complicated question, but there are exactly twelve apostles. No more, no less.

Judas was a disciple, but not an apostle. Paul was an apostle, but not a disciple. So, there's twelve, right? Now, how many of them were sent to the Jews? You shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and Judea.

Who was Jesus talking to when he said that? First chapter of Acts, the eleven. Number twelve gets flattened on the road to Damascus, flattened and blinded, and what does Jesus communicate to him? I will send him to the Gentiles. Eleven guys for the Jews, one guy for the Gentiles.

So, what is Paul's mission? And it's backwards, because you would think, well, the lack of education and qualification wouldn't really matter. The fishermen and the tax collectors and the other sort of blue-collar guys that Jesus called as the eleven, if they go to the Gentiles, the Gentiles don't care if they've been to some kind of fancy theological school for the Jews. If you're going to send somebody to the Jews, send a Pharisee.

Send somebody steeped in the law who can chapter and verse and quote vast portions. But God does just the opposite. He's the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, so he sends the Pharisee to the Gentiles, and he sends the despised, can any good thing come out of Galilee, guys to the Jews.

And it's almost like God dares people to look past the surface and find out what's really important. And he gives the Jews signs, like the sign of Jonah. And remember, Jesus almost tongue-in-cheek tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus, and the rich man in torment says, well, send Lazarus back to my brothers so that they don't suffer this fate.

And what does Abraham say? They have Moses and the prophets already. Let them hear that, because if they don't respond to what they've already got, they will not turn, even if one should rise from the dead. They got the sign of Jonah.

It's one of the biggest things, if not the biggest thing, the Holy Spirit has ever done. He was raised by God, the Holy Spirit, the power of God raised Jesus from the dead. Remember Paul's

great prayer? He says, I pray that I may come to know Christ, and what? The power of His resurrection.

That's the fullness of the Holy Spirit. That's as big as the Holy Spirit has ever done. And Paul says, he's the apostle, he's writing inspired scripture.

And he says, my prayer is that I can come to know Christ and come to know the power of His resurrection. That's the Holy Spirit. And he's still praying that prayer.

And that's one of his later epistles. So here's the thing. When these guys show up, and now there's Timothy and here's Silas, and Paul's got some history with them.

He suddenly, in their, it seems to be causative. When they arrived, he devoted himself to convincing the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, which is not his primary mission. It's great if Jews in the synagogue hear and believe, but it's an also-ran, it's an add-on, it's a benefit, it's icing on the cake.

His mission is to the Gentiles. Why else is he in Corinth? We saw the strategic location of Corinth. It's in the Gentile world.

He's not in Jerusalem. But when these guys show up, something, some switch flips in Paul's mind, and he just gets obsessed with convincing the Jews. Every time he starts talking to the Jews, bad things happen.

Every single time. So much so that these confrontations have started to wear on his spirit. How do I know that? Because, look at chapter 2 now, in 1 Corinthians.

Paul says, I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. The message of the cross.

Which, you know, for the Jews who are looking for power and the mighty God and deliverance from the Romans and give us this bread always and be our king, well, the Messiah came and he got killed. It just does not compute. It doesn't make any sense.

How, God could not possibly send an ordinary guy who basically gets himself killed. That just can't be right. So they say, you know, we're looking for power.

We're not looking for weakness. And getting yourself killed is weak. That's not the power of God.

Unless you know what God is actually doing in bringing that about. It takes a different level of comprehension. It takes more thought and more understanding of God's overall plan.

Because in the short-term near context, looking up and seeing this guy on the cross, you think, he delivered others, he can't deliver himself. And it was said at the time, right? He saved others,

but he can't save himself. He is actually in the act of saving everyone, potentially, as they say that.

And he's not, if he saved himself, the whole mission is off. And it's so scary to see people who knew their Bible looking at Jesus accomplishing God's greatest work ever, and completely misconstruing it and missing it. Because it doesn't reflect power.

And their standard is, if it's God, it's power. God has the power to make the righteous rich. God has the power to do all kinds of things.

This is not power. This is not God. And it reminds me of a fallacy I was recently describing to someone called, uh, uh, in fact, I think there was, I think it was even a, uh, article about this.

I saw somewhere, uh, there's a fallacy called affirming the consequent, and it is so convincing. And I promise if you turn on any media, you'll see it and hear it every single day. Affirming the consequent is like this.

If A, then B, B, therefore A. Now what is that? If I hit myself in the eye with a piece of firewood, like I did yesterday, I will scratch my eye. I have a scratched eye. You see what I'm saying? A is if I hit myself in the eye, B, I'll have a scratched eye.

B, I have a scratched eye. Therefore, A, I must have hit myself in the face with a piece of firewood. Do you see the fallacy? When I was a midshipman, I got hit in the eye with a snowball, and I also had a scratched eye.

But just because I have a scratched eye doesn't mean that firewood caused it. But affirming the consequent is so common. Well, this has happened.

Therefore, this has to be true because this is known to cause this. Disregarding all other possible causes. Quick example, uh, for your atheists, there's biological life on earth.

Um, and it changes under pressure from the environment. Here is an example of life that is changed by pressure on the environment. Therefore, pressure is what creates life.

Denying, ignoring any other possible cause. There's, there's things we observe in the universe. We've seen that gravity can bring stars together to form galaxies and that it can bring dust together to form planets.

Therefore, are all the stars and all the planets and everything was created by natural forces. Natural forces are known to produce these. Therefore, everything is produced by natural forces.

Well, are there other causes? Can there be intelligent direction of these? They don't want to consider it. It's affirming the consequent. You choose the explanation that you like and you believe that that's what brought it about.

Well, the Jews require a sign. The Greeks are seeking after wisdom. And in either case, it is for selfish goals.

Give us this bread always explain life in a way that appeals to me. If it doesn't appeal to me, it can't be right. So when Titus and Timothy come, Paul loses his focus and begins to talk exclusively to the Jews about Jesus being the Messiah.

And this produces a reaction back in chapter 18 of Acts. What happens? He is kicked out of the synagogue and opposition arises of a very virulent sort. It says in verse six, they opposed him and blasphemed.

They bad mouthed him. They impugned his character. They impugned his characteristics, everything about him.

And so he shook his garments and said to them, your blood be on your own heads. I am clean. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles.

Well, that's what he was supposed to do to begin with. So then he goes to the house of justice and notice it's after that, once he starts talking to the Gentiles again, and he quits trying to convince the Jews who gets saved. Look at verse nine, sorry, verse eight.

Then when he says, I'm going to the Gentiles and he moves to the house of Crispus and he sets up shop, not in the synagogue anymore, who gets saved? Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue and his whole household come to faith because the addition of these Jews is a concomitant and happens as a result. When he is focusing his heart, you remember in Romans 9, 10 and 11, he says, I would do anything on behalf of my brethren to whom belong the promises and all the rest of it. But it is the strategy of the indirect approach.

It is when you do the counterintuitive thing. When he goes only to the Gentiles, the leader of the synagogue gets saved. Why? If Paul had been earnestly focused and preaching to the Jews and kept on doing that, and then they turned and got saved, what could you say? It's a good thing I really focused and put all of my energy and concentration.

I let Titus and Timothy handle the Gentiles because with my pharisaical training, I was able to get these people in the synagogue dragged into the kingdom of God and believing in Jesus. But all of Paul's assets and resources and talents and persuasive abilities as a Pharisee has the opposite effect when he points it at the Jews. When he points himself at the Gentiles as he was commissioned to do, it's like the Venturi effect.

The Jews who are going to believe get sucked in because he's not directly confronting them. And it isn't his persuasive words of wisdom. It's the power of God.

And when they see God converting the Gentiles, when they see what happens to the Gentiles and how they abandon their former manner of life and are transformed, that's what convinces them that Jesus is the Christ. Not all of his pharisaical argument. Not all of his compelling,

compulsive, obsessive preaching.

His desire that his own people recognize the Christ almost prevents him from actually accomplishing that goal. He has to focus on what God put in front of him. And God did not send him primarily to the Jews.

They get sucked in in the wake of his ministry to the Gentiles. That's how God chose to do it. And Paul is, in essence, almost talking about himself.

You know, through the foolishness of preaching, parentheses, to the Gentiles, God is saving the Jews. It's counterintuitive. It's the opposite of expectation.

But no flesh can boast in his sight because God makes these things happen. He's not at the synagogue. He's next door to the synagogue.

And the Gentiles who come next door to the synagogue and are hearing Paul preach, that witness changes the mind of Crispus and his whole household who is in the synagogue. So all of the *Dea Martyromenos*, and the participle here means Paul was just obsessively doing this every single chance that he got, trying to persuade the Jews. But all that did was produce animosity.

Now, we're going to pause and take our break. But our observation here is one of the aspects of our faith. It isn't just believing what God says.

It isn't just knowing it and affirming it and say, yes, I know that that's true. But it often can conflict with what human common sense or human wisdom or human analysis might suggest is the best step. And of course, we don't want to just do dumb things, but we want to be prayerful and look for the power of God, the way that God is going to exercise it.

And we may have tremendous desires in our hearts, but as soon as we begin using human energy, this *Dea Martireo* that Paul starts doing, and often it is in the presence of others. It's a funny thing. He was doing fine until Silas and Timothy showed up.

And did he take that as a sign that he could turn over the Gentiles ministry to them and focus on the Jews himself? Did he take a circumstance? And something about their arrival changed his focus. It's like he says himself to the Galatians, you were running well, who hindered you? But something trips him up. And it's a pattern.

And when we come back from the break, we're going to see this goes all the way back to Acts chapter 9. It goes all the way back to Acts chapter 13. It's a common problem. And it's going to be an even bigger problem.

You remember when he finally goes back to Jerusalem? Because he can't shake his belief that if he could just make it clear enough, they will believe. And he's not the guy. It's not his job.

But he just can't give it up. And so, but we're going to see just up to the point that he's in

Corinth. Because when he says in chapter 2, I didn't come to you with power, but in weakness and fear and trembling.

I thought the apostles were mighty in the proclamation of the gospel. What does it mean when Paul says he's there in weakness and fear and trembling? It's not just a little weakness. It's weakness, fear, and trembling.

Looks to me like he's, you know, standing up to the onslaught and going in where angels fear to tread. What does he mean, weakness, fear, and trembling? We'll see that when we come back.