

November 29th, 2020

# The Kingdom of God

1 Corinthians 4:18-21

## What went wrong?

If you have missed any of our messages in 1 Corinthians, allow me to catch you up to speed. As an Apostle, Paul traveled to the city of Corinth in approximately 50 A.D. where he preached the gospel for the first time, first to the Jews, and then after being largely rejected, to the Gentiles. He ended up staying in the city for a year and six months because the Lord told him in **Acts 18:10** “I have many in this city who are my people.” Thus the Church in Corinth was born. Paul then left, because as a missionary he had many other places to teach the Word of God. Five years later, while he was in Ephesus, he started hearing troubling reports about the Church, the divisions, incest, lawsuits, prostitution, idolatry, heresy, and their selfishness. It seemed to be on the verge of falling apart. It is the most unhealthy Church on record in the NT. What happened? What went wrong?

## Corinth: a microcosm of the world

The answer to that question is *why* the Bible is the most relevant book in the world today. You see, the problem in Corinth is a microcosm—a miniature picture—of the problems we see in the world today. They forgot that they were *merely* citizens in the Kingdom of God. They forgot the truth of **Psalm 100:3** “Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his.” The problem in Corinth was that they had started to ignore their King and His rightful claim on them. Don’t you see? That is why mankind is in the state it is today. Our problem is *not* politics. There will be politics in Heaven. **Isaiah 9:6** says of Jesus “Of the increase of *his government*...there will be no end.” Our problem is not COVID, death existed before COVID, and even if COVID vanished tomorrow, we would still face death. **Ezekiel 18:20** “The soul who sins shall die.” No the problem in the world today, is same problem the

Corinthians faced: we have turned our back on the King.<sup>1</sup> The great affair of the Bible involves restoring the kingdom back to the King. Every attempt to succeed in this life without Him—without Christ—will end in failure. Everything apart Christ is the *mere talk* of arrogant people. But the Kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.

### *The Big Idea...*

The Kingdom of God has all the power you will ever need for this life and the next, and it's yours if you have Christ

- ☆ The Person of the Kingdom of God
- ☆ The Power of the Kingdom of God
- ☆ The Proof of the Kingdom of God

## I. The Person of the Kingdom of God

### **Arrogance in the Church**

Starting in v.8 of this chapter, Paul began a very sharp rebuke of the arrogance of the Corinthians. But look in v.14, he says “I do not write these

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<sup>1</sup> Children, perhaps your parents have read a story called *The Lightlings*. There was this great King called the King of Light, and He made a group of people called the lightlings. He put them in a beautiful garden and would visit them at the end of each day. But one day, tragically they chose to disobey the King of Light, and instantly they were filled with shame, so they ran as fast as they could away from the King, into the darkest part of the wood they could find. “It was so dark, they had to grope around as if they were blind, feeling their way through the forest. Often they would trip and fall, scuffing their knees and bruising themselves.” That is exactly what is happening in the world today, the whole world is roaming around in the darkness, and all misery exists because the world has left the God of Heaven. In the story, it was only the lightlings who turned back to the King and found light in His Son that were rescued from the darkness. All who refused the King’s son walked in darkness still. R.C. Sproul, *The Lightlings*, (Orlando, FL.,: Reformation Trust, 2006)

things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.” Paul’s desire is to lovingly correct them. The problem is, that there are some in the assembly who *will not* won over by gentleness. Look at **v.18** “Some are arrogant, *as though I were not coming to you.*” Arrogant, meaning puffed up or inflated with self-importance. One commentator says they became “angry with Paul for not visiting them, not because they particularly wanted him to, but because they were proud and felt offended that Paul apparently thought them unworthy of a visit.”<sup>2</sup> This is one of the most sad things in Church life, when members become suspicious of each other and of their leadership. When you start assigning motives to others, you are arrogant.

### **From the particulars to the universal**

Now Paul responds to this in **v.19-20** “But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For *the kingdom of God* does not consist in talk but in power.” Notice the grammar here. The word “for” here could be translated “after all.” “After all, *the kingdom of God* does not consist in talk but in power.” Do you see Paul’s method?<sup>3</sup> He moves from the particular to the universal. He’s putting their small-mindedness in light of what a Christian truly is. This is often what Paul does. He gives some exhortation or some appeal for earthly living, *and then* he makes this grand and mighty statement that takes us to the Heaven of Heavens. It’s like what he does in **Romans 14**. The Roman Christians were quibbling about meat and drink and days, and they couldn’t get along with each other because they had been infected with worldliness. And then Paul suddenly makes this statement that changes everything, **v.17** “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Do you see? It’s almost as if he said ‘You have forgotten what it means to be a Christian. Do you think the essence of Christianity is abstaining

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<sup>2</sup> Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 194

<sup>3</sup> Much help here from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 14:1-17, Liberty and Conscience*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2011), pg. 203

from this or that? No. Everything in this kingdom is different.<sup>4</sup> That’s precisely what Paul is doing here. He’s reminding the Corinthians that their behavior is completely out of place, because they have entered into a whole new realm<sup>5</sup>—the kingdom of God.

### What is the Kingdom of God?

We’ll come back to the Corinthian problem shortly, but first we need to know what Paul means by the kingdom of God. What is *the kingdom of God*?

**First**, we have to understand that whenever the Scripture uses the terms *the kingdom of God*, or *the kingdom of Heaven*, or *the kingdom of Christ*, it’s talking about the same thing.<sup>6</sup> One of the implications of this, is that the Kingdom of God instantly becomes perhaps the most prominent theme in the NT—mentioned more than 110 times.

**Secondly** we have to see there there is a *present* and a *future* aspect of the kingdom of God. The future aspect recognizes that the Kingdom has not yet fully come. That is why Jesus taught us to pray for the kingdom: “*Your kingdom come, your will be done*” (**Matthew 6:10**). That is why Jesus will tell us—His loved ones—at the end of this age: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, *inherit the kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (**Matthew 25:34**). So in one sense, we are still expecting the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, there is a present aspect of the Kingdom of God. It entered time and space when the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world. He told the Pharisees in **Matthew 12:28** “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then *the kingdom of God has come upon you.*” Whenever a person is born again, they are brought into the kingdom. **Colossians 1:13** “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to *the kingdom* of his beloved Son.” So the

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, pg. 233

<sup>5</sup> “Indeed, our Lord specifically puts it like that when He says in His statement to Pilate, ‘My kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36). *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Ed. Daniel J. Treier & Walter A. Elwell, 3rd Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2017), pg. 466

Kingdom of God is both future and present. That is why theologians coined the phrase “the now and not yet” of the Kingdom. “The kingdom has come among humans but *not yet* with power that compels every knee to bow before its glory.”<sup>7</sup>

**Third**, the Kingdom of God is *mainly* and *chiefly* and *ultimately* about the King. Who is at the center of every teaching about the Kingdom of God in the NT? The Lord Jesus Christ. His Lordship, His reign, His rule.

### **The kingdom of me**

The problem is that when we entered into His kingdom—by grace, through faith—we still find ourselves clinging to the way the world works. What is our basic starting point? Me. It’s all about what I want, I feel that I need, what I like, what my preferences are. We were in an elder’s meeting this past week, and I was pressing for a certain agenda item. The elder’s were in basic agreement regarding it, but Pastor Luke disagree with the way *I* was arguing. And that slightly frustrated me. Why? Because he was right and I was wrong. *My* argument, *my* reasoning, *my* perspective wasn’t accepted. But this isn’t the Kingdom of Josh, it’s the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the problem in Corinth. The Corinthian’s basic starting point was me. Some were offended that Paul didn’t come to *them*, didn’t pay attention to *them*, didn’t cater to *them*. They held to the theology of *me-ism*. They were operating in the *Kingdom of Me*.

### **If the Lord wills**

But Paul was operating on an entirely different principle. Look again how he responds to their arrogance in v.19 “But I will come to you soon, *if the Lord wills...*” Who was dictating Paul’s itinerary? Not Paul. He said I will come *if the Lord wills*. That wasn’t a throw away line. Paul had already discovered that he did not exist in the kingdom of Paul, but he was subject to the Lord in everything, *especially* his travel. Remember when he was converted? Paul’s plans were to go to Damascus and imprison Christians. But Jesus showed up.

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, pg. 468

And after He revealed Himself to Paul, Jesus told Paul what to do, **Acts 9:6** “But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” Or consider years later on Paul’s second missionary journey. **Acts 16:7** says “...they [Paul, Silas, and Timothy] attempted to go into Bithynia, *but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.*” Paul learned that he was no longer lord of his life. That little phrase in **v.19** “if the Lord wills” was the motto of his life. The Corinthians hadn’t learned that yet. You see, the Corinthians were just like us. They would not have denied who Jesus was or what Jesus did. They were not atheists. They were not heretics. Their error was much more subtle. They were arrogant, precisely because they forgot who the true King was. This was Paul’s rebuke back in **v.8**. Halfway through the verse, Paul says “Without us you have become kings.” They were not saying “Thy will be done” but “my will be done.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Practical Atheism**

So how does this apply to us? Let me ask you beloved: who is your king? The devil doesn’t care if you call yourself a Christian, or where you go to Church, or if you have your devotionals every morning. There was plenty in the Corinthian Church who did those things. The devil is only interested in one thing: who is your *functional* king? If you are a self-willed Christian, he wants you in the Church, because he knows how much damage you can do. Just look at Corinth. The Puritans had a phrase for such people: practical atheists. Practical atheists don’t deny the truth of Jesus Christ, they simply deny His Lordship. Jesus has no or very little practical effect in their life.<sup>9</sup> Practically speaking they look no different than the ideological atheist who says God doesn’t exist. What was Adam and Eve’s sin? Think hard. It wasn’t that they ate fruit. It was that they refused God’s Lordship over just one tree. God gave them the

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<sup>8</sup> “All our plans must be in subjection to the will of God.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 175

<sup>9</sup> “Actions are a greater discovery of a principle than words. The testimony of works is louder and clearer than that of words; and the frame of men’s hearts must be measured rather by what they do than by what they say.” Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God, Vol. 1*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, Reprint 1979), pg. 92

whole garden, but that wasn't enough. They didn't want God telling them what they could or could not do with that one tree. They wanted to be king. That was Satan's first lie: "You will be like God" (**Genesis 3:5**). Don't you see that is what God has delivered us from when He saved us? **Colossians 1:13** "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to *the kingdom* of his beloved Son."

### **Experimental Kingship**

This is what you need to preach to yourself everyday: 'I now live in a different kingdom. It wasn't my decision that brought me here, God himself transferred me into this kingdom. And I am no longer my own. I am not to live by my will, but by the will of Christ—who is my King.' Your greatest concern, your most earnest prayer, should be that Christ remains enthroned in your heart. It is a failure to see this that was the cause of all of the problems in Corinth and all of our problems. That's our **first point**: the chief person of the Kingdom of God is not you or I, it is the Lord Jesus Christ.

## II. The Power of the Kingdom of God

### **What the Corinthian's talk led to**

Many commentators believe these last verses of chapter four serve as an introduction to chapter five and six.<sup>10</sup> Remember that the verse numbers and chapter numbers are artificial *in one sense*, because they weren't part of the inspired text but came centuries later.<sup>11</sup> That doesn't mean they are bad, it just

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<sup>10</sup> Calvin especially. He said about v.21 "The person who divided the Epistles into chapters ought to have made this the beginning of the fifth chapter. For having hitherto reproved the foolish pride of the Corinthians, their vain confidence, and their judgment as perverted and corrupted by ambition, he now makes mention of the vices with which they were infected..." Calvin, pg. 177

<sup>11</sup> Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/divided-Bible-chapters-verses.html> Accessed November 28, 2020

means that sometimes they interrupt the flow of an argument by putting the chapter in an inconvenient place. With that in mind, let's look again at **v.19-20** "But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power." Paul making a contrast between *mere* talk and power. He wants to show what the *mere talk* of the Corinthians produced in the five years since he last saw them. Chapters 5-6 serve as EXHIBIT A. What do we find there? Incest (**5:1-13**); lawsuits (**6:1-8**); and prostitution (**6:13-20**).

### **Antinomian leaven**

And right smack in center of this is the talk the Corinthians were using to justify it all. Look at **6:12** "All things are lawful for me." Notice the quotations. Apparently this was a slogan in the Corinth Church that became part of their church. It is not an accident that this slogan is central to all their problems. You see they had mixed their gospel with antinomianism. Legalism is the heresy that says God's love towards us *depends* on something we do.<sup>12</sup> Antinomianism is the heresy that says God doesn't care how immoral I live.<sup>13</sup> It is antinomianism that is at the center of this phrase in **6:12** "All things are lawful for me." We are so free in Christ, that everything—including immorality—is lawful. That's *the talk* of the Corinthians. It became part of their gospel. And what did it produce? Incest, lawsuits, and prostitution. Chapters 5-6 are an example of what happens when a person's faith rests on the wisdom of men and *not* the power of God. Remember Paul's words back in **2:4-5** "...my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

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<sup>12</sup> Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, (New York, NY.: Viking, 2015), pg. 49

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, pg. 50



## Christianity *And*

You see, the reason why the Corinthian’s gospel produced these things in their assembly was because they *mixed* their gospel with the wisdom of men. Here’s the principle, whenever the gospel of Jesus Christ is mixed with the leaven of the wisdom of men—be it legalism or antinomianism or whatever—it loses its power. More is always less when it comes to the gospel. Anytime you add something to it, you take away from its power. C.S. Lewis illustrated this wonderfully in his brilliant but twisted classic *The Screwtape Letters*. In it we find the correspondence of a senior demon giving advice to a junior demon on how to destroy a Christian’s faith. In one letter, Screwtape writes this:

“My dear Wormwood,

The real trouble about...your patient [Christian] is...that [he] is *merely* Christian...What we want, if men become Christians at all, is to keep them in the state of mind I call ‘Christianity *And*’. You know—Christianity *and* the Crisis, Christianity *and* the New Psychology, Christianity *and* the New Order, Christianity *and* Faith Healing, Christianity *and* Physical Research, Christianity *and* Vegetarianism, Christianity *and* Spelling Reform.”<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps we could add more to that list in our own day: “Christianity *and* the Rapture,” or “Christianity *and* Social Justice.” Screwtape’s point is that whenever you mix something with the gospel, the emphasis shifts from Christ to *that thing*.

### **The emphasis in our speech is the gospel we preach**

That’s what happened in Corinth. None of them would have denied Christ. Paul specifically addresses the letter in **1:2** to “...those who...call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” But they began to mix other things with Christ. It was Christ *and* man’s wisdom. Christ *and* the philosophers. Christ *and* eloquent

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<sup>14</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York, NY.: Harper Collins, 2002), pg. 175

speech. And what happens is that Christ fades into the background. He is assumed. ‘Yes of course, we need Christ, but what we also need is fill in the blank. That is the *mere talk* that Paul is saying amounts to nothing. The danger is this: *the emphasis in our speech is the gospel we preach*. Meaning, whatever takes the priority in our speech, *just is* what we are commending to ourselves and others to solve our problems.

### **What is the real problem?**

Dear congregation, this is the problem in the world today. The emphasis is entirely in the wrong place. 2020 is the most disturbing year that we have seen in our lifetimes. But are the solutions that the world is giving? The liberals are calling for reparations for racial injustice, they’re calling for lockdowns to stop the spread of COVID, they calling for a revolution in politics—a turning to socialism in order to curb economic inequalities. What are the conservatives saying? They take the exact opposite view on all these issues. But the conservative position does not go far enough. That’s precisely why it has failed. The secular mind—both liberal and conservative—fail to see the real problem. “Instead of getting to the center of the problem, it always begins and remains on the periphery...There is only one real problem that needs to be tackled, and that is the problem of human beings themselves.”<sup>15</sup> And if the Church doesn’t see this, then we are simply adding to the problem.

### **The problem is human beings**

Think of it like this. Imagine the government discovers that a particular river is polluted. So it creates a committee and does a study, and decides to spend millions of dollars in order quarantine the river while it treats it with chemicals in order to clear up the pollution. But the river is never restored, because the problem is not in the river. The problem is in the lake out of which the river flows. The lake is the source of the problem. The world is trying to fix it’s problems today, but it is refusing to go to the source of the problem. It’s mad.

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<sup>15</sup> Lloyd-Jones, pg. 206

Show me in all of world history where the world has ever solved its own problems. They never have because they are always starting in the wrong place. We are the problem. Humanity itself. Sin. And the reason why we are in the condition we are in today is because we are turning to other gospels in order to fix what only Christ can fix. That is why the world is so divided.

### **The only cure in human history**

That is why Corinth was so divided. They were ignoring *the thing* that mattered the most. Beloved this is why God has given us His Word so we can see firsthand that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing that solve the problem of human beings.

- When Nineveh was on the verge of destruction because of it's decadence and wickedness, what stayed their judgment? God sent them the reluctant prophet Jonah to preach to them about the kingdom of God. What happened? National repentance. **Jonah 3:8-9** The king sent out a decree "Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." And they they called out mightily to God. God spared them. Accomplished not by *mere talk*, but by the power of the Kingdom of God.
- On the day of Pentecost, how did those Jews escape the bloodguilt of crucifying Jesus? God sent them Peter the fisherman to preach to them about the kingdom of God. What happened? **Acts 2:41** "...those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." Accomplished not by *mere talk*, but by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- What was the mission that Jesus gave to the apostle Paul as He sent Him out as the apostle to the Gentile world? **Acts 26:16-18** "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to...the Gentiles...to

open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins..." Jesus sent Paul out not with *mere talk*, but to manifest the power of the Kingdom of God through the preaching of the gospel.

### **Experimental emphasis**

How does this apply to us? Well ask yourself: what is the emphasis of your speech? What do you give prominence to? What are you always speaking about? What thrills you, what excites you? "What impression do you think you give to others as to what it means to be a Christian, as to what the whole kingdom of God is about?"<sup>16</sup> That's what Paul is concerned about here. There were people in Corinth who had mixed their gospel with other things—they held to a Christ *plus these other things*. And those other things took prominence. Their gospel turned to *mere talk* as opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has accomplished. They forgot that Jesus Christ is not only the King of the Kingdom of God, but He is also the message of the Kingdom of God. That's our **second point**.

## III. The Proof of the Kingdom of God

### **Power for what?**

We've seen that whenever the gospel is mixed with the wisdom of men, it lacks power. Paul says in v.20 "For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk, *but in power*." The question here is: power for what? What do we need power for? We need power to transform. Humanity is the problem. I am the problem. Sin is the problem. I need a gospel that will give me power to change and be made right with God. "A gospel that doesn't change lives is no gospel."<sup>17</sup> So then, what is *the proof* that this power is at work within me? How do I know that

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<sup>16</sup> Lloyd-Jones, pg. 239

<sup>17</sup> From MLJ's sermon on 1 Corinthians 4:20 entitled "Not in Word; but Power"

I really belong to the kingdom of God? What does this power accomplish? Let's look first of all at four ways that fail to show this power of the kingdom of God.

### 1. "I live a moral life"

First, someone might say: "I'm not an adulterer or a drunkard, or a murderer, **therefore** that must be *proof* I belong to the Kingdom of God. God's power is working in me." Well it is certainly true that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul says that in **6:9**. However, abstaining from particular sins is no proof that you belong to the Kingdom of God. In **Genesis 20:6** we see that God restrained the pagan king Abimelech from committing adultery. "...it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her." But that was no proof that Abimelech was saved. There is a difference between God's restraining power and God's gospel power. God restrains the sea, **Job 38:10-11** "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, here shall your proud waves be stayed." When God restrains sin, it is no different, He is merely keeping the sin in check, refusing it from breaking out into the open. That is far from the power that Paul is talking about here. A *mere* moral life is no evidence that one belongs to the kingdom of God.

### 2. "God has rescued me from calamity"

Second, someone might say: "God has saved me from great calamities in my life, **therefore** that must be *proof* I belong to the Kingdom of God. God's power is working in me." Praise God for His wondrous deeds of deliverance, but having God rescue you from trouble is no evidence that you belong to the kingdom of God. The children of Israel were rescued from Egypt and brought through the Red Sea, but many of them will everlastingly perish. **Jude 1:5** says "...that Jesus who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe." God's rescuing power and God's gospel power are very different. Many experience God's rescuing power in this life, who never taste the power of the kingdom.

### 3. “I feel spiritual realities”

Third, someone might say “I feel spiritual things, I have spiritual convictions, **therefore** that must be *proof* that I belong to the Kingdom of God. God’s power is working in me.” Spiritual convictions truly are among the most precious gifts that man can receive because they are communications from Heaven. But if a person *merely* feels sorrow for sin, or feels joy over hearing about Heaven, or feels fear when in the presence of God and His people, that is no proof they belong to the Kingdom of God. **Hebrews 6:4-6** talks about the miserable case of unsaved man who though he “...tasted the heavenly gift, and [has] shared in the Holy Spirit, and [has] tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come” he fell away. Judas experience all these things and Jesus called him “the son of destruction” (**John 17:12**). Merely experiencing good and true spiritual realities is no evidence that the power of the Kingdom of God is at work in you.

### 4. “I have spiritual gifts”

Fourth, someone might say “I have spiritual gifts, I can speak in tongues, or I have prophesied or worked miracles, **therefore** that must be *proof* that I belong to the Kingdom of God. God’s power is working in me.” It might surprise you that there have been prophets who prophesied by the power of the Holy Spirit who were never saved. Think of Balaam. **Numbers 24:2** says that “...the Spirit of God came upon him” when he prophesied. Yet Balaam was a wicked man, who did not belong to the Kingdom of God. Peter in his second letter points to him as an example of a false prophet. Furthermore, Paul in this very letter says that the best spiritual gifts are no proof at all of belonging to the Kingdom of God. **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels...if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains...If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” Spiritual giftedness is no sure proof that the power of the Kingdom of God is at work in you.

## Proof of life

So then what is the proof that the power of the Kingdom of God is at work in you? Here's the question: do you love the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the ultimate transformation of the gospel. Throughout this letter, Paul's main concern is not *mere* morality, it's worship. The ultimate object of the Kingdom of God is that we would come to love the King. He ends this letter with this statement summarizing it all, **1 Corinthians 16:22** "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed." That's what the King is after — our hearts.

- Look at **5:7**. How does Paul motivate the Corinthians on *the heart level* that removing this unrepentant incestuous man from the assembly is the right thing to do? He points to what Jesus has already accomplished for them. He says "Cleanse out the old leaven [meaning the sin from the assembly] that you may be a new lump, *as you really are unleavened*. For Christ, our Passover lamb, *has been sacrificed*." In other words, '...you are already free from the power and penalty of sin, because Jesus as the Lamb of God bore it on the cross. Do you not realize that Jesus was crucified for your sin so you could leave your life of sin and be with Him?
- Or look at **6:15**. How does Paul motivate the Corinthians on *the heart level* to stop visiting prostitutes? He points to how Jesus didn't merely die for us, but that He has forever united Himself to us. "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!" Paul is saying: 'Jesus is so intimately connected to your soul in union with it, that if you commit sexual immorality, it's like bringing Him along. Why would you want to do that to Him?'
- Or look at **8:12**. How does Paul motive the Corinthians on *the heart level* to honor the weaker brother's conscience? He points to their brother's intimate union with Christ. "Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, *you sin against Christ*." In other words, 'how could

you trample on your brother's conscience? Your Jesus died for him too. Will you despise the one for whom Your Savior died?'

At every turn in this letter, Paul's goal for us is not that we become morally better versions of ourselves, but that we come to see Jesus for who He really is. It is by seeing Christ, and what He has accomplished for us that brings true transformation. That that is when we experience the power of the Kingdom of God.

So if you are listening this morning, and you are full of doubt because you don't feel like you love Jesus enough so you then conclude that you must not be a Christian, let me just say: of course you don't love Jesus enough. You don't get into the Kingdom of God by loving Jesus. You get into the kingdom of God by Him loving You. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (**Romans 5:8**). God has done for man what man could not do for Himself. That is the power of the Kingdom of God

If you are listening this morning, and you are backsliding into sin, and you feel powerless against it, beloved, **Romans 6:4** says that Jesus "...was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, [so that] *we too might walk in newness of life.*" How can you turn from your sin? Let me ask you, how does a man who is famished with hunger regain his strength? He eats and drinks. Then he can face his difficulties once again. All backsliders have this in common: they have stopped eating and drinking up Christ. If you have fallen into sin, eat and drink Christ in His Word. That is where you will find the power of the Kingdom of God.

If you are listening this morning, and you are suffering and you feel like giving up. "Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...consider him who endured from sinners



such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”<sup>18</sup> Don't focus on your suffering, focus on Jesus and how He suffered for You, and You will find strength to continue to suffer for Him. That is where you will find the power of the Kingdom of God.

Or perhaps you are listening this morning, and you know that you don't belong to the Kingdom of God. You've become alarmed because you have heard that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God. And you realize that everything you have done to try and reform your wicked life always fails. What should you do? There is only one thing you can do. Turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” He is your true King. And what He requires of you to enter into His kingdom is to renounce your own lordship over your life, and give your life to Him. Jesus promises that all who receive Him, who believe in his name, will have their sins forgiven, will be given a perfect righteousness, will inherit everlasting life, and most importantly will be brought into His presence for all eternity.

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<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 12:2-3