

## Caught Up In the Grasp for Power

1 Cor. 1:18-31

### Introduction:

1. It seems the whole world is caught up in an attempt to gain control over.
2. Governments struggle to develop the ultimate weapon so that they can have control over the world.
3. Political parties want to have the majority so they can have control.
4. It has happened throughout history. It happens at every level whether in world history or in our own family, people struggle to gain power. Every contract negotiated, every arbitration; churches, marriages, races, and sexes struggle with the issue of power and control.
5. The problem is that we would all like to use irresistible force in order to gain control, but such an approach is not the way of God.
6. In the passage I am about to read, I want you to notice the emphasis on power and the way God uses it. As we study, you can contrast the world's grasp for power with the way of the cross.
7. Reading of 1 Cor. 1:18ff.

### Discussion:

- I. The word of the cross is the power of God (1:18).
  - A. This is not new to us.
    1. Perhaps we are more familiar with Paul's statement in Rom. 1:16: "The Gospel is the power of God for salvation." The good news is about what God has done on the cross.
    2. The gospel is not about what we are going to do in hearing, believing, confessing and being baptized. Those things define our response. The good news is the message about what God has done.
    3. God is the power!
  - B. The power rests in the wisdom of God, not in the wisdom of man (1:19-25).
    1. The world through its wisdom does not come to know God. Both Jewish wisdom and Gentile wisdom failed.
    2. And why not? Neither expected to find wisdom in a cross. It is based on a crucified King. Who could have dreamed that up? The message of the cross is a message about humiliation.
    3. Crosses were reserved for the lowest of the low. "You don't go to a Lazarus for financial advice, you go to the rich man" (Lk. 16:19ff). Do you go to one who perishes on a cross to find the wisdom of God? Do you go to one who perishes on a cross to find salvation? He needs to be saved and cannot save himself how would he save others? Cf. Lk. 23:35-39.

- C. The cross is such a radical contrast between the way the world grasps for power and God's powerful approach.
1. John 11:47-53 provides an example of the world's approach to power.
    - a. The chief priests and the Pharisees were fearful of losing their place.
    - b. Caiphas recommended death for Jesus as a means for crushing any rivalry.
    - c. Certainly this was a similar approach as the Romans. That's why Caiphas was afraid they would "take away our place and our nation."
  2. John 11:47-53 also provides an example of God's approach to power.
    - a. Caiphas said, "It is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish."
    - b. Verse 51 says, "He did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation."
    - c. Verse 52 adds, "And not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."
    - d. So John is saying that Jesus' death is in execution of the plan of God.
  3. But death on a cross represented powerlessness. So what represented powerlessness to men, was powerfulness to God.
    - a. The disciples (Peter in particular) had a hard time understanding this (Matt. 26:47-56).
    - b. He came to understand it. It is evident in his discourse on submission in 1 Pet. 2-3 where He sites Jesus as the model of submission who brings healing by His wounds (2:21-25).
    - c. Peter calls on us to share in the sufferings of Christ and to humble ourselves, that we may be exalted at the proper time (1 Pet. 4:12-13; 5:6).

II. While wisdom is powerful it is the wisdom of God that is powerful and not the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

- A. Verse 19 is a quotation from Isa. 29:14.
1. In Isa. 29 Jerusalem sees herself as "the Lion of God" (the king of the jungle, the most powerful of beasts), but God will bring her low.
  2. He will shut their eyes, the prophets and cover their heads, the seers (v. 10). In other words the revelation of God will be cut off from them.
- B. When we diminish the word of God we cut ourselves off from His power.
1. When we exalt our thinking over His, weakness takes over.
  2. We give control to Satan who reduces us to nothingness.
  3. The wisdom of God always lifts us up.
- C. It is by God's doing that we are lifted up (1 Cor. 1:26-31).
1. Verse 31 quotes from Jer. 9:23.
  2. Jer. 9:23-24 says, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who

boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on the earth; for I delight in these things, declares the Lord.”

3. It is not just that God exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness toward us, but that we ought to exercise this toward others. To follow the path of the cross in laying down our lives for others. The wisdom of God is not just about our being saved, but it is about following the wisdom of God in washing the feet of others, in submitting to others and responding to them in the way the cross has responded to us. It is not about taking power away, but about giving power.

III. Thus Paul depends upon the revelation of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

- A. For Paul, Jesus Christ and Him crucified was the message.
- B. The world operated contrary to the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 2:6-9).
- C. The things Paul communicates are wisdom from God (1 Cor. 2:10-13).
- D. This sets the background for everything that he says in the epistle.
  1. In matters of leadership it is not about grabbing for power but about service (1 Cor. 3:5ff).
  2. In legal matters why not rather be wronged (6:7ff).
  3. In marriage let God be in control (7:1ff).
  4. In matters regarding eating meat, submit to one another (8:1ff).

Conclusion:

1. We should depend on the revelation of God when it comes to our personal salvation.
2. We should see His message as summarized in the cross.
3. We should recognize that it is by His doing that we are in Christ, and be thankful.
4. We should re-evaluate our approach to power and instead of forcefully grasping for it, we should let God have it and trust in Him to exalt us at the proper time.