

## True Church (3)- A Community of the Cross

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(1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

### I. Introduction

- A. I read an article by Mike Oppenheimer entitled “*The One True Church*”
1. In the article, Oppenheimer briefly explores a dozen or so religious groups
    - a. Some are familiar (*Catholic, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witness, Seventh Day Adventist*)
    - b. Some are obscure (*True Jesus Church, House of Yahweh, Universal World Church*)
  2. All of these share one thing in common—the *claim to be only true church*
    - a. Oppenheimer begins by affirming his list of groups could be much longer  
*Just about everyone who has started a movement has declared themselves the only true church on earth. In this they claim one must join their exclusive group or organization to be saved and to be a Christian.*
    - b. All denominations begin when someone find some key biblical truth(s)
    - c. This truth had been ignored by all others, but now it’s been restored
  3. With truth now firmly in hand, they group becomes only true church
- B. Those who claim to be only church always have one thing in common. **Pride**
1. They believe they have accomplished what other disciples have not
    - a. Like Indiana Jones, they have become “*Raiders of the Lost Truth*”
    - b. The focus is on what they’ve done— righteous because they are right
  2. The book of 1 Corinthians was written to a church wracked with self pride
    - a. This pride was ethnic (*Greek-Jew*), social (*rich-poor*), religious (*gifts*)
    - b. This pride led to sectarian divisions, lawsuits, neglect of the poor, etc.
  3. Paul points them back to only thing in which they need pride—the **cross**

### II. The Way of Wisdom, The Way of Sings (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

- A. The Greek Christians in Corinth stressed the *way of wisdom, human philosophy*
1. Truth was discovered and delineated through observation and reasoning
    - a. Human philosophy and wisdom was the way to discover truth truth
    - b. Corinth was a Greek city; this fascination with wisdom impact church
    - c. Is this why so many at Corinth followed Apollos? (1:12) *Greek Rhetoric*
  2. Paul reminded them that to philosophers, the cross is mere **foolishness**.
    - a. A crucified and resurrected god simply made no sense to Greek wisdom
    - b. Philosophers of Areopagus listened until word of “*resurrection*” (17:32)

- B. The Jews stressed the **way of signs**—personal experience of the miraculous
1. They knew God as a God of wonders (**Psa 40:5**). *They knew the stories*
    - a. Noah, Abraham, Moses—the presence of God was seen in signs
    - b. That’s why the Jewish leaders always demanded signs from Jesus
      - 1) When Jesus cleared Temple, the Jews asked for signs (**John 2:18**)
      - 2) After feeding the 5000, the Jewish leaders ask for sign (**John 6:30**)
      - 3) Even after feeding 4000, Jewish leaders demand a sign (**Matt 16:1**)
  2. So many of the Jewish Christians at Corinth really focused on way of signs
    - a. Is that why many followed Peter— connection to Jesus and miracles?
    - b. Is that why they argued over spiritual gifts— *who had the best of signs*
  3. So the church in Corinth argued over the way of wisdom and way of signs
- C. In many ways, the church still argues over the way of **wisdom** and of **signs**
1. The church I grew up in stressed **way of wisdom**—*logic and argument*
    - a. We’re a people focused on book-chapter-n-verse and biblical authority
      - 1) We speak where the Bible speaks; we wanted to go back to the Bible
      - 2) We tried to be a “*people under the word*” we talked about last week
    - b. Our strength became our weakness—constant battle over who is right
      - 1) Wasn’t enough to be Biblical; we had to be the only ones who were
      - 2) We argued and divided over issues while all claimed to be biblical
      - 3) The more we argued, the more narrow (*and irrelevant*) truth become
    - c. Church became “*war of interpretation*” based on the **way of wisdom**
  2. Many became weary of all this, and they focused on the **way of signs**
    - a. They rightly rejected this head-only religion of issues and division
      - 1) They sought an experience of God that was relational and personal
      - 2) It was no longer enough for God to be studied, He also had to be felt
    - b. But rather just restore the place of emotion, emotion became the focus
      - 1) God’s presence became one’s own personal experience (“*holy wow*”)
      - 2) Truth came to be judged by the emotional impact of the worship
    - c. Often the controls of truth were left behind in search of that impact
  3. The head-only **way of wisdom** was replaced by a heart-only **way of signs**

### III. True Church: The Way of the Cross

- A. Paul says that there is a way other than wisdom or signs—**way of the cross**
1. Both **wisdom** and **sign**, “*Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (24)
    - a. Jesus’ sign in **John 2:18**? “*Destroy this temple and I’ll raise it again*”
    - b. The sign that they asked for was the way of the **cross** and **resurrection**
  2. For Paul, the **way of cross** was the very essence of the gospel (**1 Cor 2:1-2**)
    - a. The emphasis on **wisdom** and on **signs** caused divisions in Corinth
      - 1) They argued about their preachers and their rights—*wisdom*
      - 2) They argued about who had most impressive spiritual gift— *signs*
    - b. But God’s ultimate wisdom and sign is found in the **way of the cross**
      - 1) At the cross, God stepped into human history and into human misery
      - 2) At the cross, God took on himself our sin, our failure, our wounds
      - 3) At the cross, heaven and earth met and eternity becomes a reality
    - c. Yes, we want to stress what we KNOW and have EXPERIENCED
  3. But Paul words to a struggling church is “*the way of the cross leads home*”
- B. The way of the cross is foolishness to those who seek wisdom & signs (**1:22-23**)
1. William Willimon puts his finger on the absurdity of the cross—

*What kind of sense does it make to worship a God who, instead of rescuing us out of trouble, rescues us by entering into the trouble with us? A God who, instead of helping us to avoid pain, heals us from our pain by entering the depths of our pain with us? A God who, instead of fixing things for us, addresses them by becoming weak with us in our weakness?*

    - a. In terms of human wisdom, the cross really makes no earthly sense at all
    - b. Was the cross **really** God’s best effort as a sign (*Sodom, Flood, Plagues*)  
(*The Roman Centurion who presided over the crucifixion might beg to differ here*)
  2. If we really see the message of the cross, we will not focus on ourselves
    - a. We won’t take pride in our knowledge, our experiences or our church
    - b. When we really, truly see the cross, then the cross is all we see
      - 1) What happened in the theater after *Passion of the Christ* finished?
      - 2) Did people leave in silence? Why? *Because they has seen the cross*
    - c. If we really see the cross, then only boasting we can do is in the cross

*I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom  
But I will boast in Jesus Christ His death and resurrection (“How Deep the Father’s Love”)*

## IV. Conclusion

A. “*This I know with all my heart, his wounds have paid my ransom*” **Do we really?**

1. So what is a true church? A true church is a community of the cross
  - a. It is a church committed to believing, living and proclaiming the cross
  - b. It is a church too focused on what Jesus did to boast in anything it does
  - c. It is a church so focused on the cross, that the cross is all they see
2. It is not about what we figure out or what we do—it’s Him
  - a. What the Psalmist said so long ago is still so true for us today (**Psa 115:1**)  
*Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.*
  - b. A true church is one that seeks to live as a community of the cross

B. The way of the cross is not doctrine to salute, but a lifestyle to live

1. The solution to the problems in the church at Corinth & today is the cross
  - a. **Disunity:** Sectarian splits, lawsuits, doctrinal issues & social division
    - 1) Message of the cross is that all are made one in Christ Jesus
    - 2) We can’t divide because we are all covered in blood (**Gal 3:28**)
  - b. **Immorality:** Some visited prostitutes and one practiced incest
    - 1) Message for immortality is that the cross makes us holy
    - 2) The cross tells us we’re “*dead to sin and alive to God*” (**Rom 6:11**)
    - 3) God in Jesus makes us “*holy through his own blood*” (**Heb 13:12**)
  - c. **Greed:** Cross is God’s judgment against the material things of earth
    - 1) Jesus left all the riches of heaven to walk in the way of the cross
    - 2) The way of cross calls to see materials things differently (**1 Jn 3:16**)
2. Paul’s call to the way of the cross is anything but esoteric and ethereal
  - a. The way of cross is the functional center of the Christian faith and life
  - b. The way of cross is the way of unity, holiness and true spirituality
  - c. The way of the cross is a way of sacrifice, self-denial, putting others 1<sup>st</sup>
  - d. The way of the cross praises God for what He did, and not ourselves
  - e. The way of the cross seems foolish and silly to the world apart from God
3. But it is the way of the cross that leads home—that is the invitation today