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Foolishness and Weakness in the Corinthian Letters

*Review of Kevin on Romans*

- The apostle Paul and the “walk and talk”

- The gospel as a balance between lawlessness and legalism

- Focus passage: Romans 5:1-10

I. *Introduction*

II. *The story of the Corinthian church*

1. Paul plants the church in Corinth with “weakness and much trembling” (I Cor 2:3). Cf

 Acts 18:1-16.

2. Others come and build on the foundation Paul had laid. Paul writes a letter to the

 Corinthians from Ephesus, now lost (see I Cor 5:9), in light of reports of the church’s

 tendency toward divisiveness and immaturity.

3. At some point during his time at Ephesus, Paul receives word about the church at

 Corinth, (from “some from Chloe’s household,” 1:1), which prompts him to write 1

 Corinthians.

4. Paul’s “painful visit” (2 Cor 2:1) and conflict with false “apostles” (2 Cor 11:13-15).

5. Paul writes another letter, also lost, out of “great distress, anguish of heart, and with

 many tears” (2 Cor 2:4).

6. A good report from Titus prompts Paul to write 2 Corinthians. The first part, chaps 1-9,

 full of love and gratitude, is a meditation on his ministry as an apostle. The last four

 chapters, however, are sharper in tone, and constitute a fierce defense of his status as

 an apostle.

III. *Introducing the focus passages*

A. Finding a theme in the Corinthian letters – foolishness and weakness

B. Tracing that theme in Corinth’s particular sins

C. An important precedent for Christian ministry

IV. *Table time*

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 – The foolishness of the gospel

1. Paul names two human tendencies for responding to spiritual claims: “Jews demand

 signs and Greeks seek wisdom” (22). How are these tendencies seen in our culture? In

 ourselves?

2. Have you ever felt ashamed of the evident “foolishness” of the gospel in the face of

 some other more polished or culturally acceptable wisdom? How did you react?

3. In what ways do we try to “dress up” the gospel or make it more palatable?

4. Is Paul saying the gospel is irrational? That it isn’t philosophically or intellectually

 viable? If not, what is he saying? How can we make that distinction?

2 Corinthians 4:7-18 – Weakness and Christian ministry

1. What people have you known who have personified the kind of Christian ministry Paul

 describes in verses 9 and 10? In what ways did their lives affect you?

2. Paul links this kind of sacrificial ministry to the death and resurrection of Jesus himself

 (10-11). Why is this connection important?

3. Paul contrasts “lightness” with “weight” in verse 17. Discuss the theological import of

 this rhetorical figure. How does this recast our daily experiences?

V. *Application*

1. In 2 Cor. 4:17-18, Paul encourages a different way of looking at the world. Can you

 think of examples of where you see this “weight of glory” evident in your church,

 home, workplace, etc.? Spend some time thinking about some specific examples and

 write them down.

2. Be encouraged! “So we do not lose heart…” (2 Cor 4:16). Though it may seem

 difficult or gloomy, the effect of this teaching is to give meaning to our sufferings and

 discouragements.

*Further Reading*

“Lament for a Son” Nicholas Wolterstorff

“The Weight of Glory” C. S. Lewis