

Week 6 - (5:13) Handout

“If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.”

Religious Life in Corinth (temples in the city)

- **Aphrodite** was the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility.
- **Apollo** was the god of prophecy and it would have been common for women and other temple patrons to seek answers to their life questions of fate and prosperity from the temple prophets.
- **Argaea** was a goddess of marriage.
- **Tyche** was the god of fate and luck.
- **Demeter** was a Greek god associated with fertility and mysteries.
- **Asklepios** was a god associated with physical and mental healing.

Delphic Prophets in Corinth

- Delphi was an ancient city during the classical period with the main temple to Apollo and the legendary location of Apollo defeat of Python.
- Apollo spoke through the *priestess* of the oracle at Delphi (an older woman of blameless life). Legend says that this sibyl fell into a trance and then would rave using ecstatic speech that was then translated by the priests of the temple. (historical evidence does not verify “ecstatic” speech that required interpretation, but rather direct answers to the questioner)
- In 1st Cen. people asked questions of the Delphic oracle on all kinds of issues ranging from personal decisions to important concerns of the state. Questions about marriage and childbearing were some of the most frequent topics. (ponder 1 Cor 14:35 in this connection).

Delphic vs. Dionysiac Prophetess

- Delphic – oracles speak directly to questioner. Legend depicts ecstatic behaviors
- Dionysiac – associated with mania, frenzy, ecstatic actions
- → Ecstatic / mania / “crazy looking” behavior was associated with spiritual experiences, oracles, etc.

1 Cor 14:23 – indicates that “speaking in tongues” may have been easily confused with the “mania” or “insanity” associated with other religious settings.

2 Cor 5:13 – “out of our mind”

- Paul’s opponents in Corinth were complaining that either Paul was “insane” or that he lacked ecstatic visions to boast about (note 1 Cor 14). Connection to speaking in tongues issue in 1 Cor?
- Paul deliberately engaged in “reasonable discourse” to the Corinthians (1 Cor 14:18) and preferred “intelligible speech” but evidently this left him open to the charge that he was less “spiritual” than some of his opponents who emphasized “ecstatic” experiences.

Paul’s Ecstatic Experiences

- Acts 9 – light and voice from heaven
- Gal 2:1f – “because of a revelation”
- 1 Cor 2:10 – “revelation by Spirit”
- 1 Cor 14:18 – “speaking in tongues”
- 2 Cor 12:1 – “heavenly vision”

Paul’s reluctance to claim legitimacy based on externals

- (2:17) - Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.
- (3:1f) – “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? ² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody.
- (4:1f) – “Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”
- (11:5f) - But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those “super-apostles.” ⁶ I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way.”
- (11:16f) – too long to include
- (13:1-4) – “This will be my third visit to you. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” ² I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, ³ since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. ⁴ For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him to serve you.”

Discussion Points

What is Paul trying to say with this verse?

- Paul says, “If we are out of our mind it is for God, if we are in our right mind, it is for you.” What other motives could there be? What do you suspect his critics are accusing him of?
- If the religious culture of his day associated “ecstasy” with valid religious experience, why would Paul want to avoid giving the Corinthians the “authentic sign” of his own religious status within their culture?
- (Read 1 Cor 2:1-5; 1 Cor 14:6-19; 2 Cor 5:11) Given the religious setting of his time, why might Paul emphasize a “cognitive” presentation of the gospel? Why does he prefer prophecy over tongues?

How does this shape our ministry of the Gospel?

- In our culture, what impresses people more; unusual experiences or ideas?
- What aspects of everyday Christian experience are based on “irrational” claims?
- In our culture, what “proofs” of the gospel should we emphasize and which “proofs” should we minimize?
- How does our “make sense” convictions affect our reading of Scripture and our understanding of Christian life?