

1 Corinthians 4:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

Analysis

For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. This terse summary encapsulates Paul's argument. *Hē basileia tou Theou* (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, "the kingdom of God") is not *en logō* (ἐν λόγῳ, "in word/speech") but *en dynamei* (ἐν δυνάμει, "in power"). *Logos* here means empty rhetoric, impressive but impotent talk. *Dynamis* refers to the Spirit's transformative power—regeneration, sanctification, miracles, boldness under persecution, genuine love (Rom 1:16; 15:13, 19; 1 Thess 1:5).

This principle applies beyond the Corinthian context. God's reign manifests not through eloquent preaching or theological sophistication alone but through lives transformed by the Spirit. The kingdom advances when the gospel's power breaks addictions, reconciles enemies, produces joy amid suffering, and inspires sacrificial love. Paul's entire ministry validated this truth—his message seemed foolish by worldly standards, yet the Spirit used it to plant churches and transform lives (2:4-5).

Historical Context

The phrase 'kingdom of God' was central to Jesus's teaching (Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43) and early Christian proclamation (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Paul uses it less frequently than the Synoptics but with consistent meaning: God's saving reign inaugurated in Christ, present now through the Spirit, consummated at Christ's return. The Corinthians' over-realized eschatology (v. 8) and obsession

with rhetorical wisdom (1:17-2:5) both missed this point: God's kingdom comes not through impressive words but transforming power.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How do you assess whether your Christian life is characterized by genuine Spirit-power or merely eloquent words about the faith?
2. What evidence of the kingdom's power—transformed character, sacrificial love, Spirit-filled boldness—marks your life and church community?
3. In what specific ways can you move beyond talking about the gospel to demonstrating its life-changing power?

Interlinear Text

οὐ	γὰρ	ἐν	λόγῳ	ἡ	βασιλεία	τοῦ	θεοῦ	ἀλλ'	ἐν
is not	For	in	word	G3588	the kingdom	G3588	of God	but	in
G3756	G1063	G1722	G3056		G932		G2316	G235	G1722

δυνάμει

power
G1411

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 2:4 (Word): And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

1 Thessalonians 1:5 (Word): For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Romans 14:17 (Kingdom): For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Romans 1:16 (References God): For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Romans 15:19 (References God): Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:24 (References God): But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

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