

1 Corinthians When Faith & Life Collide

Study 2

The Gospel and the Divided Church

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor

of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

But as it is written:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For “who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”

A. The power lies in the Cross, not wisdom

1 Corinthians 1:17

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”

- 1. Discussion question. If our salvation was based on words of eloquent wisdom instead of understanding the meaning of the cross, what are the implications? Is our salvation secure? Why or why not?**

B. The Cross is irrational only to those who are spiritually dead

1 Corinthians 1:18

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

- 2. Reflection question. How do your non-Christian friends view the Lord Jesus Christ? Why do they see Him that way?**

C. God’s wisdom is designed to defy human logic

1 Corinthians 1:19-21

“For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”

- 3. Discussion question. In the Bible, God consistently gives instructions that are seemingly foolish to man. We have been given 3 examples in the video lecture. Find another such “foolish” instance of God’s instruction in the Bible. (There is more than 1 correct answer.)**

4. Comprehension question. Why does God give such “foolish” commands?

D. Human logic traps him

1 Corinthians 1:22-24

“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

5. Reflection question. Why do you think human logic is insufficient to understand God’s wisdom? Do we ever unconsciously try to do that?

E. The Corinthians themselves are evidence of the power of the Cross

1 Corinthians 1:25-28

“ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,”

6. Discussion question. There are instances in which the weak overcome the strong in the Bible. Give an example and discuss where their strength came from? (There is more than 1 correct answer.)

7. Discussion question. What does this teach us?

F. The Cross proves that salvation is unmistakably God's

1 Corinthians 1:29-31

“that no flesh should glory in His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— 31 that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.””

8. Discussion question. If the Cross was so outrageously foolish in man's sight and yet is able to save us, what does this say about the origin of salvation from sin, death, and hell?

G. Paul's preaching is based on the Cross

2 Corinthians 2:1-5

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

- 9. When preaching the Gospel, should we focus on making it sound good to the audience or making it clear to the audience? Which is more important? Why?**

2 Corinthians 2:6

“However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.”

- 10. Comprehension question. What is the nature of the wisdom of this world?**

11. Fill in the blanks. Consider the following verses. Based on the video lecture, what lessons do they teach us about the Spirit of God?

Verse Number	Verse	Lesson about the Spirit of God
v. 10	"But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God."	
v. 11-12	<p>"For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.</p> <p>Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."</p>	
v. 13	"These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."	

12. Discussion question. What is the danger of tampering/watering down the Gospel?

Takeaway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The power lies in the Cross, not wisdom B. The Cross is irrational only to those who are spiritually dead C. God's wisdom is designed to defy human logic D. Human logic traps him E. The Corinthians themselves are evidence of the power of the Cross F. The Cross proves that salvation is unmistakably God's G. Paul's preaching is based on the Cross

Case Study

Case 1 – The Old Cross vs The New Cross

“The old cross slew men, the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemns men, the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it” - A. W. Tozer

1. What do you think he is trying to warn us about?

Case 2 – Spiritually Discerned?

Casey had a friend at his work place with whom he had been trying to reach out to. She was highly intellectual and asked many questions like how do we know that there is a God? Or how do we know that Jesus really rose from the dead? Or how do we know the Bible is the Word of God? She also asked " How does Jesus' death save her from her sin?" Her friend did not really understand at all.

Casey had no answers but told her that all she needed to know was that Christ died for her and she needed to accept Him as Lord and Saviour. It was all a matter of faith only. She made this conclusion based on 1 Cor 2:14 - "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

1. Is Casey's conclusions correct? Is there a difference between not understanding the message of the gospel and rejecting the message as foolishness?

2. What should Casey do with her friend?

Case 3 – Preaching: Eloquence, Power, or Neither

Thomas was part of the leadership team in a Baptist church where a new pastor had been hired. His preaching was extremely boring and long winded rambling round and round without much structure nor points. He had however preached on the cross as well.

He had only a form 5 education and went to bible college straight after dropping out of secondary school. Most of the congregation were graduates or post graduates. He was very defensive when members commented on his sermons.

He said that it was they who were unspiritual as they failed to recognise his spirituality and were too used to the worldly wisdom which depended on eloquence. However, he had great pastoral skills in ministering to people personally.

When some of the leaders suggested he enrol himself for more preaching classes or allow some of the more gifted lay preachers to take the pulpit with him he objected and quoted Paul in 1 Cor 2:1-5 and said that since Paul was not eloquent neither should he be. It was the leaders who were ungodly and using worldly wisdom. The pastor said that eloquent preachers were not godly preachers.

1. Is it right for the new pastor to quote 1 Cor 2 :1-5 as a defense for his poor sermons?

2. Is he right in blocking the lay preachers from preaching?

3. Do you agree with his statement that eloquent preachers are not godly preachers? What will happen to this church in the long run?