



Community Group Discussion Guide

April 7, 2024

1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 2:1-5 | Faith in God's Wisdom and Power

MOTIVATE

Starter Question:

⇒ *What is some secular wisdom that seems to be fascinating to the world today? Has this made its way into the church?*

DISCUSS

Paul visited Corinth on his second missionary journey. (See [1 Corinthians Overview](#) for additional information.) Although Paul initially was met with resistance, a struggling church was born. The church was plagued with problems and needed Paul's guidance. These issues challenged the church's nature and unity.

In 1 Corinthians 18:1-31 and 2:1-5, Paul dealt with these new believers' fascination with secular wisdom. They thought the church could benefit more from the world's wisdom to win converts to Christ rather than relying on the message of the cross of Christ.

⇒ *Why is Christianity fundamentally opposed to the world's beliefs, values, and standards?*

1 Corinthians 1:18-21 *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.*

God seeks to make Himself known to us. One of His methods of self-disclosure is through Christ's cross. It is necessary to the knowledge of God. In verse 18, Paul presented two kinds of people—each of whom view the gospel in opposite ways:

1. Those who are perishing: Unbelievers who live according to the standards of human wisdom and wrongly conclude that the message of the cross is foolishness.
2. Those who are being saved: Believers who rightly perceive that the cross is the power of God bringing salvation from sin and death.

⇒ *What are some other ways these two groups are in opposition to each other?*

To support his claim, in verse 19, Paul quoted Isaiah 29:14, where Isaiah rebuked Israel for challenging God by relying on worldly wisdom. Paul indicated that just as in the time of Isaiah, God

will destroy any wisdom that opposes Him. The words Paul used for “destroy” can mean frustrate, reject, refuse, ignore, make invalid, set aside, and break.

⇒ ***What do these words indicate about the value God puts on the wisdom of this world?***

In verse 20, Paul continued to point out God’s opposition to worldly wisdom with three rhetorical questions about whom the world has as its own spokespersons: the wise person, the scholar, and the debater. Paul ended with a question to which a positive response is expected: Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

⇒ ***Discuss this quote: God demonstrated the folly of human wisdom in Christ in that human wisdom would never lead anyone to think that God would allow His Son to be crucified to save man. By acting in a way that human wisdom would label “foolish,” God frustrated human wisdom.¹***

In verse 21, Paul made clear the flaw in human wisdom is that it leaves us without knowledge of God. No matter how hard it tries, it simply is unable to find the ultimate, saving reality: God Himself.

In opposition to the efforts of humanity, God was pleased to choose another way of salvation for those who believe. He chose something that the wise of this world would consider foolish—the crucified Savior. By ordaining this seemingly foolish means of salvation, God made the world’s so-called wisdom to be foolishness.²

⇒ ***Have you encountered a person who declared the cross to be foolishness? Share your experience.***

⇒ ***Why does the cross of Christ require a response of faith?***

1 Corinthians 1:22-25 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, **23** but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, **24** but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Paul mentioned two groups for whom the call to faith in the cross of Christ was offensive:

1. The Jews: They looked for signs that identified the Messiah who would deliver them from Roman oppression. The Gospels record that the Jews repeatedly requested signs from Jesus to prove He was from God. Yet even the miracles Jesus performed did not satisfy them because He would not perform at their bidding. In addition, the Jews had no place for a Messiah who died on a cross (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Thus, faith in Christ was a stumbling block to the Jews.

⇒ ***If people think the gospel is foolish or a stumbling block, how does anyone come to faith?***

¹ Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). *I & II Corinthians* (Vol. 7, p. 21). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). *I & II Corinthians* (Vol. 7, p. 21). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

2. The Greeks: They embraced human wisdom and demanded rational proofs according to their own ideals. They exalted their pagan philosophies and poets. That an itinerant Jewish teacher who died on a cross was the Son of God and Savior of the world seemed foolish. They rejected the gospel because it did not meet their standards of human wisdom.

- ⇒ ***Discuss this quote: Many Gentiles could hardly have imagined a more ridiculous religion than one that proclaimed salvation through the death of one man on a Roman cross. A God who could not overcome His human enemies and who died at their hands like a common thief was not a God one should reasonably trust for salvation.³***
- ⇒ ***To whom is the call to faith in Christ offensive today?***

In contrast to the standards of judgment used by Jews and Greeks, Paul said he simply preached the redemptive work of Christ on the cross.

- ⇒ ***Why might Paul have been tempted to reduce the Christian message to something acceptable to Jews or Greeks?***
- ⇒ ***Do we have the same temptation today?***

Paul closed this paragraph by explaining how a person, whether Jew or Greek, could accept the way of salvation in Christ as wise even when most people considered it foolish. Believers have come to recognize something about the gospel of the crucified Christ:

- It is wiser than man's wisdom: Only the wisdom of God can call a person to joyfully accept the gospel of the cross.
- It is stronger than man's strength: Only the power of God can rescue humanity from bondage to sin, judgment, and death.

- ⇒ ***Why did God ordain a gospel that the world would find foolish?***

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

Paul reminded the Corinthians of their condition when God first called them to salvation. Not many were deemed wise philosophers or seen as powerful in any circle of influence. Nor were they born into wealthy families. They had no basis from which to assert their superiority over one another. This explains why Paul described them with words like foolish, weak, low, and despised. He wanted to remind them that they had no basis for boasting.

Paul also acknowledged that from the world's point of view, the Corinthian believers had been utterly foolish to believe in Christ as the way of salvation. Yet, for the most part, these are the people God

³ Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). *I & II Corinthians* (Vol. 7, p. 22). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

delighted to save in order to shame the wise and strong and to “bring to nothing” people who claim to be something.

God filled the church at Corinth with people who amounted to very little by human standards in order to demonstrate that these standards were wrong. God wanted to make clear that what has been done is His work. He called believers to put faith in the simple gospel. Christians can properly boast, not in our own achievements, but in the Lord.

- ⇒ ***How would you define the gospel in its simplest terms?***
- ⇒ ***Why does this remove any grounds for us to boast in God’s presence about our own self-sufficiency?***
- ⇒ ***How do we ensure we give God the credit due Him?***

If the world deems people unfortunate who cannot boast about their own accomplishments, blessings in Christ far more than compensate. In Him, believers receive true wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption from slavery to sin—all the benefits of the cross. The Corinthians had seen their practical, daily lives changed by the power of the gospel of Christ. He had become the sole source of their holiness.

- ⇒ ***How will you boast in Christ today?***
- ⇒ ***What blessings have you received from Him?***

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

Paul reminded the Corinthians about:

1. His message: Paul was single-minded, focusing on one truth--Christ and Him crucified. Paul didn’t present the gospel according to the world’s wisdom or by relying on impressive speech. Instead, he presented a compelling message by centering his message on what God did in sending His Son.
2. His manner: Paul may not have been in top form when he arrived in Corinth. He had experienced physical abuse because of his faith in Christ. He also had difficulties with his sight and possibly other illnesses. In his suffering he may have come across as weak. As a result, it was clear he relied on the demonstrations of the Spirit’s transforming power as he presented Christ, not on his own power.

- ⇒ ***Why must human eloquence always remain subservient to the message of the Gospel and the divine work of the Spirit?⁴***
- ⇒ ***How do we ensure we’re relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to share the message of the cross?***

⁴ Blomberg, C. (1994). *1 Corinthians* (p. 58). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

3. His motivation: Paul's desire was to know nothing except Jesus. He was hopeful that others would place their faith and build their lives in the power of God rather than the wisdom of men.

⇒ ***"Is your driving passion to "know Christ and Him crucified"***

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: The key verse from this study rests in 1 Corinthians 2:5, ". . . so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." The Corinthians came to faith by focusing on the cross of Christ even though it seemed foolish to the world around them. The cross should also be the foundation of our faith today. No matter what the world says about our Christian beliefs, we can rest assured that the gospel is true.

⇒ ***Why must we remember that the world rejects the truth of the gospel and that worldly "wisdom" is error?***

⇒ ***How can we resist arrogance in our salvation?***

⇒ ***How can we imitate Paul's humble simplicity in sharing the gospel message?***

2. Pray: Ask God for the discernment to know His wisdom in contrast to the wisdom of the world. Confess our human tendency to be drawn away from Him to worldly standards. Praise Jesus for the wisdom and power of the cross.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 and 2 Corinthians, pages 18-30.*
- *The NIV Application Commentary, I Corinthians, pages 51-61.*
- *Shepherd's Notes, I Corinthians, pages 13-18.*